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## The Ghost in the Red Shirt

by Bertha. M. Bower

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The proper way to begin this story would be to assure the reader, first of all, that I have never believed in ghosts; that is the way ghost-stories usually begin, I think. Also, I should say that what I am about to relate is perfectly true—but I won't begin it like that. As a matter of fact, I don't care much whether you believe me or not, and I always did believe in ghosts—at least, I always hoped they were truer than Santa Claus, and that some day I should see one.

Aunt Jane—but I don't want to begin with Aunt Jane either: she always did begin everything in my life, ever since I can remember, and she sha'n't begin this story. I don't mean her even to know I wrote it—she'd only say I'm crazy, and I'm not.

This is the way it all happened, and, mind, I don't care whether you believe it or not. It _happened_, and your belief or disbelief won't alter that one important fact. And he was the dearest old ghost—but wait till I start at the beginning, as I should have done before.

We had gone across the lake that evening in the little sail-boat, the New Woman. Jack named it, you might know; he said she was full of whims and it took a man to hold her nose in the wind—Jack's awfully sarcastic.

There were just six of us—Aunt Jane and Mabel, Cousin Jack, Professor Goldburn, and Clifford Wilton. Clifford and I weren't on very friendly terms. We had been engaged, though Aunt Jane didn't suspect it. But it was all over, and my sweet little ruby ring was lying somewhere off Weir Point, where Clifford threw it one day—but this is a ghost-story.

Nothing happened during the sail except that my hat blew away and Mabel hinted that it wasn't an accident—that I liked to show off my

hair. I said I didn’t show off any hair but what I might justly call my own, and, of course, that made Mabel mad—angry, I mean. Aunt Jane scolded me, as usual: it’s easy to tell which niece has the money.

We landed to visit a cave in the cliff, and Mabel and Clifford flirted outrageously. It wasn’t a bit interesting—I mean the cave. The flirting didn’t worry me: I was particularly nice to Professor Goldburn—so nice that Aunt Jane called me her dear child twice, and the Professor came near offering me his heart and hand. Jack saved me: he called us all to the boat just as the Professor got fairly warmed to his subject. Of course, I ran as soon as Jack called, leaving the Professor to come nipping along behind—I hate fat men, anyway.

A storm was muttering up from the horizon, and the oily, ugly clouds were almost over our heads before we pushed off, on account of Mabel and Clifford loitering along the cliff path and acting that silly!

The lake was smooth as glass and ink black, and the look of it made me shiver, with four miles of it between us and home.

Jack raised the sail, but it hung limp, so there was nothing for it but to row. Jack and Clifford went to work, while I steered the boat. Clifford spoke once to me: we ignored each other, as a rule.

“Better keep her close in. We’ll try to round this point and run into the cove before she strikes.”

“If we don’t,” remarked Jack cheerfully, “she’ll flop us; and, oh mister, she won’t do a thing to us!”

I rather thought “she” would do several things to us, but I didn’t stop to argue the point—there wasn’t time. I don’t know just how it came about, but Jack was right—she “flopped” us.

We weren’t far from shore, so the upset wasn’t very serious. The water was so shallow we could easily wade ashore, though Mabel called for help, and, of course, it was Clifford who rescued her—from water no deeper than our bathtub! It is incredible, the foolishness of that girl!

I was first to climb the bank, and when I had watched the others land I just sat down in the wind and the rain and laughed. (Mabel says I will probably laugh at my own funeral; I’m positive I could have laughed at hers just then.) The idea of a great, overgrown girl like her (she weighs a hundred and fifty pounds if she weighs an ounce) sobbing on a young man’s shoulder! and the curl all out of her hair,

and the complexion washed off her face in streaks. It's a wonder she didn't turn Clifford sick; but, then, men show dreadfully poor taste at times. I don't suppose I was very entrancing myself just then, but, thank goodness, my complexion will bear washing!

The New Woman reached the shore, upside down, almost as soon as we did, and my old golf-cape, that Aunt Jane insists I shall carry with me always in the boat, dangled on a wave-washed willow. Jack waded in and rescued it and Aunt Jane's little gray shawl (her green umbrella's gone forever, for which I am very thankful). Mabel's sailor-hat washed ashore while we stood there, and Clifford got that.

Then Jack remembered that there was an old cabin near there, and we found what had once been a well-trodden path leading back from the shore into the woods. We followed it dismally, with the lightning to guide us.

Jack led the way, reciting: "It was night! The vivid lightnings flashed athwart the vaulted sky and shook their fiery darts upon the shuddering earth. The elements were in wild commotion!"—or something like that. I think he got it out of a "Penny Dreadful."

Just as Jack said "commotion," with a fine roll upon the word, the Professor caught his toe upon a root, and down he went—and I laughed. Aunt Jane didn't call me her dear child that time; she said, "Zel-l-l-ah!" But I don't care. Jack laughed too, though he did pretend he was just coughing.

We found the cabin, half hidden by the tall burdocks and wild rosebushes. The door-step was sunken and covered deep with the leaves of many summers.

Jack threw open the door and cried "Spooks!" in a sepulchral tone which gave me a chill, but when Mabel gave a squawk and caught Clifford's arm I just pushed Mr. Jack headlong over the threshold and went on in.

The lightning glared in at the open door and showed us a great, old fireplace, with a huge pile of dry wood stacked in one corner, and there were some chairs and a table, and that was all.

Jack swooped down upon the fireplace with a shout, and we had a roaring fire in no time, for Jack's matches were dry, for a wonder. Goodness knows he paid enough for his matchbox; Aunt Jane said it was a scandalous price, but it was worth every cent of it to have dry matches that night. We huddled around the fire, half frozen from our

ducking. I spread out my old golf-cape to dry, so that I might have some good of the old thing—I had lugged it around all summer and hadn't used it once. Aunt Jane and I took down our hair and wrung out the water. Mabel wouldn't; she said hers wasn't very wet—and that settled the switch question in my mind, and from the way Jack grinned I know what he thought about it—and Aunt Jane trying to make a match between those two!

Professor Goldburn backed up to the fire, rubbed his pudgy hands together behind him, and ogled till I felt downright sick, but I wouldn't show it. He had lost his eyeglass and the curl was out of his mustache and his collar all crumpled, and that oily smile didn't seem to match the rest of him a bit. I don't care if he is worth a million or more, I just think he's horrid! I smiled back at him just to see Clifford scowl. But Clifford wasn't looking my way. He was whispering something to Mabel and had his back turned to me—both of which I consider rude in anybody, no matter who does it.

Then Jack got to wondering what was in the next room, for there appeared to be two, and he and I went to explore.

The room had been a bedroom, I think. It was bare of everything but dust and cobwebs, and was so small it didn't take us long—Jack only burned one match and two fingers.

After that we sat around the fire and listened to the storm, and tried to think we weren't famished, which was hard to do, seeing we had had nothing since luncheon.

Aunt Jane worried over Uncle John and how anxious he'd be, but I was rather glad for him. He'd lectured me awfully that morning because I wasn't nice and dignified, like Mabel. I hoped he'd remember it with remorse.

Jack sang coon-songs and even did a cake-walk. I got up and helped him in that, just to shock Mabel. She thinks cake-walking is very unladylike, and always looks scandalized when I begin anything of the kind.

Aunt Jane—to punish us, I think—started the Professor going on his pet microbes, and once he was started, no one else had any show whatever. He droned on about bacilli and other horrors, and gravely assured us that old cabin was undoubtedly swarming with awful-sounding germs. Fancy being married to such a man—ugh!

Aunt Jane presently fell asleep, and as Clifford took to staring

moodily into the fire and not seeming to remember anything but his thoughts, Mabel soon followed Aunt Jane’s example. I was hungry and cross, and even the Professor couldn’t talk me to sleep.

I wrapped my golf-cape around me and cuddled in an old armchair in front of the fireplace, with Jack and the Professor upon either side of me and Clifford on a little bench against the wall. Aunt Jane and Mabel were on the side opposite Clifford, though they, being asleep, do not count.

I was beginning to hold my eyes open with some effort, when something roused me, and I sat up straight and listened. The storm was still beating furiously against the cabin walls, but another sound was distinctly audible. There could be no mistake—someone was walking back and forth in the other room.

We looked at one another, and I admit a creepy feeling went up my spine just at first.

Clifford caught up a brand from the fire and started for the closed door, and we all followed him. When we crowded into the doorway we saw nothing but the dust and the cobwebs and the dancing glare of Clifford’s torch upon the rough board walls. It was such a bare little room that I think we all felt a bit ashamed of our nerves.

The footsteps had ceased, and only the wind and rain, beating upon the low roof, could be heard.

“It’s the wind,” said Clifford, pointing his torch downward to freshen the blaze.

“It was the water dripping from some branch upon the roof,” said the Professor—and that was the most sensible remark he had made that night.

“More likely it’s rats,” put in Jack. “Can’t be a ghost—they’re noted chiefly for the noise they _don’t_ make.”

I pinched Jack soundly for mentioning ghosts, and spoke as firmly as I could with my teeth chattering so,—

“It’s your microbes, Professor.”

Jack snickered, and the Professor rolled his eyes reproachfully at me.

Then we all went back to the fire and Jack threw on more wood. The

Professor went on talking, only this time it was about telepathy, or something of that sort. And soon we heard that heavy, measured tread, as before. I must say I didn't much like the sound of it—coming like that, with no feet to make the thing seem reasonable, and with no ghost to make it creepily interesting, but the men appeared to ignore the tramping, so I tried to not care.

Jack fell to smoking cigarettes, seeing Aunt Jane was asleep, and Clifford poked the ashes into fanciful little heaps and got creases in his forehead. He did look glum and no mistake, but I couldn't see that he was afraid, or anything like that.

After awhile my eyes went shut, just for a minute. I could still hear the Professor's voice droning like a big bumble-bee, when suddenly he stopped short in the middle of a sentence. That was odd, for he does love to round out his sentences nicely, even when he is interrupted.

I opened my eyes and looked at him. He was gazing, with mouth half open and with eyes full of fear, at something behind me.

Well, you know how it is when someone begins to stare _behind_ you—if you were to be hanged for it the next minute, you'd turn and look. You couldn't help it.

I turned in my chair, and—br-r-r-r! I went cold all over, with little prickles in my scalp. (I suppose that was my hair standing on end, though Jack says it always does.)

Coming slowly across the room, straight towards me, was a man—ghost—oh, I don't know what! I gave one horrified glance, then I jumped from the armchair and with one bound I was on the little bench, snuggled up to Clifford's side. I didn't realize it till I felt his arm—well, under the golf-cape! (That blessed old cape shall never go to the ragman, I assure you.)

I was none too soon, for as I sprang from the chair It slid into it. There he sat—a short, stocky figure, with grizzled hair and rough, toil-hardened hands. His eyes were dull and gazed straight into the fire.

I must confess I was the tiniest bit disappointed after that first glance. I had all my life longed to see a really, truly ghost, but this one was neither picturesque nor orthodox. Where was the white winding-sheet? He wore faded blue overalls and a red flannel shirt! As to the chill, I have felt that before.

For instance, when Clifford threw my ring away out, and I watched the widening circle where it fell, while he said bitterly, “There goes my faith in women,” I felt the very same creepy cold trickling down my back. I believe I even felt worse that time.

We all sat as if paralyzed. After a minute I gathered courage to glance up at Clifford’s face, and, do you know, he actually seemed to enjoy the situation! He looked down at me, and his _eyes_ smiled—and I’m not sure but his lips did, as well. I know he didn’t seem a bit scared.

Jack certainly was white, though he scouted the idea afterwards, and the Professor’s face was like a great lump of beef suet.

After what seemed hours—and was probably only seconds—the apparition rose, glided back to the door, and disappeared.

Jack drew a long breath and finished making a cigarette, though I know his hand shook and made it hard work. The Professor gathered himself together, said “Lord bless my soul!”—it was as bad as swearing, the way he said it,—and raised a forefinger.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” he began in a shaky half-whisper, “it would seem that we have just beheld something unusual and—er—startling.”

“Well, I should tell a man!” said Jack, glancing furtively over his shoulder as he drew a match along the edge of his chair.

“Now,” continued the Professor hurriedly, somewhat steadied by Jack’s composure (though I’m certain that was only assumed), “I would suggest, in the interest of scientific research, that before anything is said upon the subject we each in turn write a brief description of the—er—phenomenon. In this way there will be less danger of our impression being colored by that of another mind, and—er—ladies first.”

With this lame finish he handed me a little, red note-book and a pencil.

“Write briefly what you saw,—I take it you _did_ see something,—then turn the page and pass the book to Mr. Wilton.”

This struck me as being decidedly original, and since I was not nearly as frightened as one would suppose (it was _such_ a comfort being reconciled to Clifford!), I took the book and did the best I could.

Then Clifford drew his arm reluctantly from under my cape,—I hope and pray no one knew it was there all this while,—scribbled rapidly, turned the page, and gave the book to Jack, and then his arm oh, well, what could I do? I did try pinching his hand, but his fingers caught mine in an awful grip and wouldn't let go, and so—what could I do?

Just then Aunt Jane woke with a shiver.

"Mercy," she said, "what an awful storm!"

In a moment she noticed the steps in the other room.

"Strange," she said, turning her head to listen. "What is it, do you think?"

"Wind," said the Professor rather curtly, for him.

"Water," said Clifford, giving my fingers a squeeze.

"Rats," announced Jack, in a tone which left us doubtful as to his meaning.

"Microbes," finished I, not to be outdone by their brevity and aplomb.

"Zella!" cried Aunt Jane, glancing apprehensively at the Professor.

The Professor looked at me and sighed, and Jack clapped both hands over his heart and nearly sighed himself off the three-legged stool. Jack can't endure Professor Goldburn.

"Zella," began Aunt Jane pointedly, "don't you think you would be more comfortable in that chair?" (meaning the ghost chair.)

"No, I don't!" I snapped, very impertinently, I'm afraid—but catch me sitting in _that chair_ again!

Aunt Jane turned to Jack, perched uncomfortably on the stool. (Now Jack is proverbially lazy: he never sits upright when he can lean.)

"Well, Jack! I never knew you to let a cushioned armchair go begging an occupant. What's the matter?"

"Oh, nothing," drawled Jack. "You sit there yourself, mother."

"Well, I will. It looks more comfortable than this straight-backed one," and she settled down heavily on the faded calico cushion, while

I shivered with horror.

If the ghost in the red shirt returned—well, Aunt Jane is one of the screaming sort.

We sat quiet a long time, it seemed to me. I was just wondering if I dared lean my head against Clifford and take a nap when I felt his arm tighten warningly. I looked, and there was the ghost gliding up to the chair, his lustreless eyes fixed upon the fire as before.

Jack turned and saw it, and grew white. He can't convince _me_ he wasn't scared, for he looked it.

I stared, horrified. I tried to cry out, but before I could limber my tongue (it felt so dry and helpless) the ghost reached the chair and—sat right down upon Aunt Jane! He really did! She stirred a little and shivered.

"Throw more wood on the fire, Jack," she said, "I feel chilly."

Chilly! Good Heaven, I think we all did! Even Jack's splendid nerve was shaken at sight of his own mother dandling that Thing upon her knees.

"Mother!" he cried, and his voice sounded hoarse (for a fellow that wasn't scared), "for God's sake, move!"

Well, there's a gap in the story here that I can't fill.

The next I remember Aunt Jane was fanning me with Mabel's sailor-hat, and Jack stood by with an old tomato-can full of water which leaked a stream almost, and he looking very sober. The Professor was rubbing his hands together and saying, "Lord bless my soul!" over and over. I hate that man!

The ghost in the red shirt was gone, and I could not hear any footsteps in the vacant room.

After that it was a thousand years till morning. Our watches had all stopped, so I may be allowed my own estimate of the time, I hope.

Well, I think that's all of the ghost-story. It would take too long to tell how we walked home at daybreak—six miles, it was, right through the woods, and Aunt Jane and the Professor puffing like steam-engines before we had gone a mile—or how Uncle John had a steam-launch out searching for our remains. All that would make another story, and one

is my limit.

Oh, I didn’t go to sleep in that cabin and dream all this—how would you account for Clifford’s behavior since that night, then? And what about the red note-book? That is evidence that the ghost was real enough, I should think.

We had all seen him alike, only Jack said he “wanted a shave,” which I hadn’t noticed, and the Professor wrapped his description up in so many long words that there was no getting at the sense of it—except that he _did_ see a ghost.

Aunt Jane didn’t see him at all; she says she’d have died of fright if she had; and, of course, Mabel, sleeping through the performance as she did, was perfectly furious. She even went so far as to say we all made it up among us just to annoy her.

Mabel and the Professor left the same day soon after that. Mabel simply couldn’t treat me decently after she knew——

Oh, and I have another ruby ring, exactly like the one which lies off Weir Point. And Clifford has oceans of faith in women.

(The End.)

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# THE PURLOINED LETTER

by Edgar Allan Poe
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*The Works of Edgar Allan Poe, Vol. 2*

*Nil sapientiae odiosius acumine nimio.*

_Seneca_.

At Paris, just after dark one gusty evening in the autumn of 18-, I was enjoying the twofold luxury of meditation and a meerschaum, in company with my friend C. Auguste Dupin, in his little back library, or book-closet, au troisiême, No. 33, Rue Dunôt, Faubourg St. Germain. For one hour at least we had maintained a profound silence; while each, to any casual observer, might have seemed intently and exclusively occupied with the curling eddies of smoke that oppressed the atmosphere of the

chamber. For myself, however, I was mentally discussing certain topics which had formed matter for conversation between us at an earlier period of the evening; I mean the affair of the Rue Morgue, and the mystery attending the murder of Marie Rogêt. I looked upon it, therefore, as something of a coincidence, when the door of our apartment was thrown open and admitted our old acquaintance, Monsieur G--, the Prefect of the Parisian police.

We gave him a hearty welcome; for there was nearly half as much of the entertaining as of the contemptible about the man, and we had not seen him for several years. We had been sitting in the dark, and Dupin now arose for the purpose of lighting a lamp, but sat down again, without doing so, upon G.'s saying that he had called to consult us, or rather to ask the opinion of my friend, about some official business which had occasioned a great deal of trouble.

"If it is any point requiring reflection," observed Dupin, as he forebore to enkindle the wick, "we shall examine it to better purpose in the dark."

"That is another of your odd notions," said the Prefect, who had a fashion of calling every thing "odd" that was beyond his comprehension, and thus lived amid an absolute legion of "oddities."

"Very true," said Dupin, as he supplied his visiter with a pipe, and rolled towards him a comfortable chair.

"And what is the difficulty now?" I asked. "Nothing more in the assassination way, I hope?"

"Oh no; nothing of that nature. The fact is, the business is very simple indeed, and I make no doubt that we can manage it sufficiently well ourselves; but then I thought Dupin would like to hear the details of it, because it is so excessively odd."

"Simple and odd," said Dupin.

"Why, yes; and not exactly that, either. The fact is, we have all been a good deal puzzled because the affair is so simple, and yet baffles us altogether."

"Perhaps it is the very simplicity of the thing which puts you at fault," said my friend.

"What nonsense you do talk!" replied the Prefect, laughing heartily.

“Perhaps the mystery is a little too plain,” said Dupin.

“Oh, good heavens! who ever heard of such an idea?”

“A little too self-evident.”

“Ha! ha! ha--ha! ha! ha!--ho! ho! ho!” roared our visiter, profoundly amused, “oh, Dupin, you will be the death of me yet!”

“And what, after all, is the matter on hand?” I asked.

“Why, I will tell you,” replied the Prefect, as he gave a long, steady and contemplative puff, and settled himself in his chair. “I will tell you in a few words; but, before I begin, let me caution you that this is an affair demanding the greatest secrecy, and that I should most probably lose the position I now hold, were it known that I confided it to any one.”

“Proceed,” said I.

“Or not,” said Dupin.

“Well, then; I have received personal information, from a very high quarter, that a certain document of the last importance, has been purloined from the royal apartments. The individual who purloined it is known; this beyond a doubt; he was seen to take it. It is known, also, that it still remains in his possession.”

“How is this known?” asked Dupin.

“It is clearly inferred,” replied the Prefect, “from the nature of the document, and from the non-appearance of certain results which would at once arise from its passing out of the robber’s possession; that is to say, from his employing it as he must design in the end to employ it.”

“Be a little more explicit,” I said.

“Well, I may venture so far as to say that the paper gives its holder a certain power in a certain quarter where such power is immensely valuable.” The Prefect was fond of the cant of diplomacy.

“Still I do not quite understand,” said Dupin.

“No? Well; the disclosure of the document to a third person, who shall be nameless, would bring in question the honor of a personage of most exalted station; and this fact gives the holder of the document an

ascendancy over the illustrious personage whose honor and peace are so jeopardized."

"But this ascendancy," I interposed, "would depend upon the robber's knowledge of the loser's knowledge of the robber. Who would dare--"

"The thief," said G., "is the Minister D--, who dares all things, those unbecoming as well as those becoming a man. The method of the theft was not less ingenious than bold. The document in question--a letter, to be frank--had been received by the personage robbed while alone in the royal boudoir. During its perusal she was suddenly interrupted by the entrance of the other exalted personage from whom especially it was her wish to conceal it. After a hurried and vain endeavor to thrust it in a drawer, she was forced to place it, open as it was, upon a table. The address, however, was uppermost, and, the contents thus unexposed, the letter escaped notice. At this juncture enters the Minister D--. His lynx eye immediately perceives the paper, recognises the handwriting of the address, observes the confusion of the personage addressed, and fathoms her secret. After some business transactions, hurried through in his ordinary manner, he produces a letter somewhat similar to the one in question, opens it, pretends to read it, and then places it in close juxtaposition to the other. Again he converses, for some fifteen minutes, upon the public affairs. At length, in taking leave, he takes also from the table the letter to which he had no claim. Its rightful owner saw, but, of course, dared not call attention to the act, in the presence of the third personage who stood at her elbow. The minister decamped; leaving his own letter--one of no importance--upon the table."

"Here, then," said Dupin to me, "you have precisely what you demand to make the ascendancy complete--the robber's knowledge of the loser's knowledge of the robber."

"Yes," replied the Prefect; "and the power thus attained has, for some months past, been wielded, for political purposes, to a very dangerous extent. The personage robbed is more thoroughly convinced, every day, of the necessity of reclaiming her letter. But this, of course, cannot be done openly. In fine, driven to despair, she has committed the matter to me."

"Than whom," said Dupin, amid a perfect whirlwind of smoke, "no more sagacious agent could, I suppose, be desired, or even imagined."

"You flatter me," replied the Prefect; "but it is possible that some such opinion may have been entertained."

"It is clear," said I, "as you observe, that the letter is still in

possession of the minister; since it is this possession, and not any employment of the letter, which bestows the power. With the employment the power departs."

"True," said G.; "and upon this conviction I proceeded. My first care was to make thorough search of the minister's hotel; and here my chief embarrassment lay in the necessity of searching without his knowledge. Beyond all things, I have been warned of the danger which would result from giving him reason to suspect our design."

"But," said I, "you are quite au fait in these investigations. The Parisian police have done this thing often before."

"O yes; and for this reason I did not despair. The habits of the minister gave me, too, a great advantage. He is frequently absent from home all night. His servants are by no means numerous. They sleep at a distance from their master's apartment, and, being chiefly Neapolitans, are readily made drunk. I have keys, as you know, with which I can open any chamber or cabinet in Paris. For three months a night has not passed, during the greater part of which I have not been engaged, personally, in ransacking the D-- Hotel. My honor is interested, and, to mention a great secret, the reward is enormous. So I did not abandon the search until I had become fully satisfied that the thief is a more astute man than myself. I fancy that I have investigated every nook and corner of the premises in which it is possible that the paper can be concealed."

"But is it not possible," I suggested, "that although the letter may be in possession of the minister, as it unquestionably is, he may have concealed it elsewhere than upon his own premises?"

"This is barely possible," said Dupin. "The present peculiar condition of affairs at court, and especially of those intrigues in which D-- is known to be involved, would render the instant availability of the document--its susceptibility of being produced at a moment's notice--a point of nearly equal importance with its possession."

"Its susceptibility of being produced?" said I.

"That is to say, of being destroyed," said Dupin.

"True," I observed; "the paper is clearly then upon the premises. As for its being upon the person of the minister, we may consider that as out of the question."

"Entirely," said the Prefect. "He has been twice waylaid, as if by

footpads, and his person rigorously searched under my own inspection."

"You might have spared yourself this trouble," said Dupin. "D--, I presume, is not altogether a fool, and, if not, must have anticipated these waylayings, as a matter of course."

"Not altogether a fool," said G., "but then he's a poet, which I take to be only one remove from a fool."

"True," said Dupin, after a long and thoughtful whiff from his meerschaum, "although I have been guilty of certain doggrel myself."

"Suppose you detail," said I, "the particulars of your search."

"Why the fact is, we took our time, and we searched every where. I have had long experience in these affairs. I took the entire building, room by room; devoting the nights of a whole week to each. We examined, first, the furniture of each apartment. We opened every possible drawer; and I presume you know that, to a properly trained police agent, such a thing as a secret drawer is impossible. Any man is a dolt who permits a 'secret' drawer to escape him in a search of this kind. The thing is so plain. There is a certain amount of bulk--of space--to be accounted for in every cabinet. Then we have accurate rules. The fiftieth part of a line could not escape us. After the cabinets we took the chairs. The cushions we probed with the fine long needles you have seen me employ. From the tables we removed the tops."

"Why so?"

"Sometimes the top of a table, or other similarly arranged piece of furniture, is removed by the person wishing to conceal an article; then the leg is excavated, the article deposited within the cavity, and the top replaced. The bottoms and tops of bedposts are employed in the same way."

"But could not the cavity be detected by sounding?" I asked.

"By no means, if, when the article is deposited, a sufficient wadding of cotton be placed around it. Besides, in our case, we were obliged to proceed without noise."

"But you could not have removed--you could not have taken to pieces all articles of furniture in which it would have been possible to make a deposit in the manner you mention. A letter may be compressed into a thin spiral roll, not differing much in shape or bulk from a large knitting-needle, and in this form it might be inserted into the rung of

a chair, for example. You did not take to pieces all the chairs?”

“Certainly not; but we did better--we examined the rungs of every chair in the hotel, and, indeed the jointings of every description of furniture, by the aid of a most powerful microscope. Had there been any traces of recent disturbance we should not have failed to detect it instantly. A single grain of gimlet-dust, for example, would have been as obvious as an apple. Any disorder in the glueing--any unusual gaping in the joints--would have sufficed to insure detection.”

“I presume you looked to the mirrors, between the boards and the plates, and you probed the beds and the bed-clothes, as well as the curtains and carpets.”

“That of course; and when we had absolutely completed every particle of the furniture in this way, then we examined the house itself. We divided its entire surface into compartments, which we numbered, so that none might be missed; then we scrutinized each individual square inch throughout the premises, including the two houses immediately adjoining, with the microscope, as before.”

“The two houses adjoining!” I exclaimed; “you must have had a great deal of trouble.”

“We had; but the reward offered is prodigious!”

“You include the grounds about the houses?”

“All the grounds are paved with brick. They gave us comparatively little trouble. We examined the moss between the bricks, and found it undisturbed.”

“You looked among D--‘s papers, of course, and into the books of the library?”

“Certainly; we opened every package and parcel; we not only opened every book, but we turned over every leaf in each volume, not contenting ourselves with a mere shake, according to the fashion of some of our police officers. We also measured the thickness of every book-cover, with the most accurate admeasurement, and applied to each the most jealous scrutiny of the microscope. Had any of the bindings been recently meddled with, it would have been utterly impossible that the fact should have escaped observation. Some five or six volumes, just from the hands of the binder, we carefully probed, longitudinally, with the needles.”

“You explored the floors beneath the carpets?”

“Beyond doubt. We removed every carpet, and examined the boards with the microscope.”

“And the paper on the walls?”

“Yes.”

“You looked into the cellars?”

“We did.”

“Then,” I said, “you have been making a miscalculation, and the letter is not upon the premises, as you suppose.”

“I fear you are right there,” said the Prefect. “And now, Dupin, what would you advise me to do?”

“To make a thorough re-search of the premises.”

“That is absolutely needless,” replied G--. “I am not more sure that I breathe than I am that the letter is not at the Hotel.”

“I have no better advice to give you,” said Dupin. “You have, of course, an accurate description of the letter?”

“Oh yes!”--And here the Prefect, producing a memorandum-book proceeded to read aloud a minute account of the internal, and especially of the external appearance of the missing document. Soon after finishing the perusal of this description, he took his departure, more entirely depressed in spirits than I had ever known the good gentleman before. In about a month afterwards he paid us another visit, and found us occupied very nearly as before. He took a pipe and a chair and entered into some ordinary conversation. At length I said,--

“Well, but G--, what of the purloined letter? I presume you have at last made up your mind that there is no such thing as overreaching the Minister?”

“Confound him, say I--yes; I made the re-examination, however, as Dupin suggested--but it was all labor lost, as I knew it would be.”

“How much was the reward offered, did you say?” asked Dupin.

“Why, a very great deal--a very liberal reward--I don’t like to say how

much, precisely; but one thing I will say, that I wouldn't mind giving my individual check for fifty thousand francs to any one who could obtain me that letter. The fact is, it is becoming of more and more importance every day; and the reward has been lately doubled. If it were trebled, however, I could do no more than I have done."

"Why, yes," said Dupin, drawlingly, between the whiffs of his meerschaum, "I really--think, G--, you have not exerted yourself--to the utmost in this matter. You might--do a little more, I think, eh?"

"How?--in what way?'

"Why--puff, puff--you might--puff, puff--employ counsel in the matter, eh?--puff, puff, puff. Do you remember the story they tell of Abernethy?"

"No; hang Abernethy!"

"To be sure! hang him and welcome. But, once upon a time, a certain rich miser conceived the design of spunging upon this Abernethy for a medical opinion. Getting up, for this purpose, an ordinary conversation in a private company, he insinuated his case to the physician, as that of an imaginary individual.

"'We will suppose,' said the miser, 'that his symptoms are such and such; now, doctor, what would you have directed him to take?'

"'Take!' said Abernethy, 'why, take advice, to be sure.'"

"But," said the Prefect, a little discomposed, "I am perfectly willing to take advice, and to pay for it. I would really give fifty thousand francs to any one who would aid me in the matter."

"In that case," replied Dupin, opening a drawer, and producing a check-book, "you may as well fill me up a check for the amount mentioned. When you have signed it, I will hand you the letter."

I was astounded. The Prefect appeared absolutely thunder-stricken. For some minutes he remained speechless and motionless, looking incredulously at my friend with open mouth, and eyes that seemed starting from their sockets; then, apparently recovering himself in some measure, he seized a pen, and after several pauses and vacant stares, finally filled up and signed a check for fifty thousand francs, and handed it across the table to Dupin. The latter examined it carefully and deposited it in his pocket-book; then, unlocking an escritoire, took thence a letter and gave it to the Prefect. This functionary grasped it

in a perfect agony of joy, opened it with a trembling hand, cast a rapid glance at its contents, and then, scrambling and struggling to the door, rushed at length unceremoniously from the room and from the house, without having uttered a syllable since Dupin had requested him to fill up the check.

When he had gone, my friend entered into some explanations.

“The Parisian police,” he said, “are exceedingly able in their way. They are persevering, ingenious, cunning, and thoroughly versed in the knowledge which their duties seem chiefly to demand. Thus, when G-- detailed to us his mode of searching the premises at the Hotel D--, I felt entire confidence in his having made a satisfactory investigation--so far as his labors extended.”

“So far as his labors extended?” said I.

“Yes,” said Dupin. “The measures adopted were not only the best of their kind, but carried out to absolute perfection. Had the letter been deposited within the range of their search, these fellows would, beyond a question, have found it.”

I merely laughed--but he seemed quite serious in all that he said.

“The measures, then,” he continued, “were good in their kind, and well executed; their defect lay in their being inapplicable to the case, and to the man. A certain set of highly ingenious resources are, with the Prefect, a sort of Procrustean bed, to which he forcibly adapts his designs. But he perpetually errs by being too deep or too shallow, for the matter in hand; and many a schoolboy is a better reasoner than he. I knew one about eight years of age, whose success at guessing in the game of ‘even and odd’ attracted universal admiration. This game is simple, and is played with marbles. One player holds in his hand a number of these toys, and demands of another whether that number is even or odd. If the guess is right, the guesser wins one; if wrong, he loses one. The boy to whom I allude won all the marbles of the school. Of course he had some principle of guessing; and this lay in mere observation and admeasurement of the astuteness of his opponents. For example, an arrant simpleton is his opponent, and, holding up his closed hand, asks, ‘are they even or odd?’ Our schoolboy replies, ‘odd,’ and loses; but upon the second trial he wins, for he then says to himself, ‘the simpleton had them even upon the first trial, and his amount of cunning is just sufficient to make him have them odd upon the second; I will therefore guess odd;’--he guesses odd, and wins. Now, with a simpleton a degree above the first, he would have reasoned thus: ‘This fellow finds that in the first instance I guessed odd, and, in the second, he will propose to

himself, upon the first impulse, a simple variation from even to odd, as did the first simpleton; but then a second thought will suggest that this is too simple a variation, and finally he will decide upon putting it even as before. I will therefore guess even;'--he guesses even, and wins. Now this mode of reasoning in the schoolboy, whom his fellows termed 'lucky,'--what, in its last analysis, is it?"

"It is merely," I said, "an identification of the reasoner's intellect with that of his opponent."

"It is," said Dupin; "and, upon inquiring of the boy by what means he effected the thorough identification in which his success consisted, I received answer as follows: 'When I wish to find out how wise, or how stupid, or how good, or how wicked is any one, or what are his thoughts at the moment, I fashion the expression of my face, as accurately as possible, in accordance with the expression of his, and then wait to see what thoughts or sentiments arise in my mind or heart, as if to match or correspond with the expression.' This response of the schoolboy lies at the bottom of all the spurious profundity which has been attributed to Rochefoucault, to La Bougive, to Machiavelli, and to Campanella."

"And the identification," I said, "of the reasoner's intellect with that of his opponent, depends, if I understand you aright, upon the accuracy with which the opponent's intellect is admeasured."

"For its practical value it depends upon this," replied Dupin; "and the Prefect and his cohort fail so frequently, first, by default of this identification, and, secondly, by ill-admeasurement, or rather through non-admeasurement, of the intellect with which they are engaged. They consider only their own ideas of ingenuity; and, in searching for anything hidden, advert only to the modes in which they would have hidden it. They are right in this much--that their own ingenuity is a faithful representative of that of the mass; but when the cunning of the individual felon is diverse in character from their own, the felon foils them, of course. This always happens when it is above their own, and very usually when it is below. They have no variation of principle in their investigations; at best, when urged by some unusual emergency--by some extraordinary reward--they extend or exaggerate their old modes of practice, without touching their principles. What, for example, in this case of D--, has been done to vary the principle of action? What is all this boring, and probing, and sounding, and scrutinizing with the microscope and dividing the surface of the building into registered square inches--what is it all but an exaggeration of the application of the one principle or set of principles of search, which are based upon the one set of notions regarding human ingenuity, to which the Prefect, in the long routine of his duty, has been accustomed? Do you not see he

has taken it for granted that all men proceed to conceal a letter,--not exactly in a gimlet hole bored in a chair-leg--but, at least, in some out-of-the-way hole or corner suggested by the same tenor of thought which would urge a man to secrete a letter in a gimlet-hole bored in a chair-leg? And do you not see also, that such recherchés nooks for concealment are adapted only for ordinary occasions, and would be adopted only by ordinary intellects; for, in all cases of concealment, a disposal of the article concealed--a disposal of it in this recherché manner,--is, in the very first instance, presumable and presumed; and thus its discovery depends, not at all upon the acumen, but altogether upon the mere care, patience, and determination of the seekers; and where the case is of importance--or, what amounts to the same thing in the policial eyes, when the reward is of magnitude,--the qualities in question have never been known to fail. You will now understand what I meant in suggesting that, had the purloined letter been hidden any where within the limits of the Prefect's examination--in other words, had the principle of its concealment been comprehended within the principles of the Prefect--its discovery would have been a matter altogether beyond question. This functionary, however, has been thoroughly mystified; and the remote source of his defeat lies in the supposition that the Minister is a fool, because he has acquired renown as a poet. All fools are poets; this the Prefect feels; and he is merely guilty of a non distributio medii in thence inferring that all poets are fools."

"But is this really the poet?" I asked. "There are two brothers, I know; and both have attained reputation in letters. The Minister I believe has written learnedly on the Differential Calculus. He is a mathematician, and no poet."

"You are mistaken; I know him well; he is both. As poet and mathematician, he would reason well; as mere mathematician, he could not have reasoned at all, and thus would have been at the mercy of the Prefect."

"You surprise me," I said, "by these opinions, which have been contradicted by the voice of the world. You do not mean to set at naught the well-digested idea of centuries. The mathematical reason has long been regarded as the reason par excellence."

"'Il y a à parièr,'" replied Dupin, quoting from Chamfort, "'que toute idée publique, toute convention reçue est une sottise, car elle a convenue au plus grand nombre.' The mathematicians, I grant you, have done their best to promulgate the popular error to which you allude, and which is none the less an error for its promulgation as truth. With an art worthy a better cause, for example, they have insinuated the term 'analysis' into application to algebra. The French are the originators

of this particular deception; but if a term is of any importance--if words derive any value from applicability--then ‘analysis’ conveys ‘algebra’ about as much as, in Latin, ‘ambitus’ implies ‘ambition,’ ‘religio’ ‘religion,’ or ‘homines honesti,’ a set of honorablemen.”

“You have a quarrel on hand, I see,” said I, “with some of the algebraists of Paris; but proceed.”

“I dispute the availability, and thus the value, of that reason which is cultivated in any especial form other than the abstractly logical. I dispute, in particular, the reason educed by mathematical study. The mathematics are the science of form and quantity; mathematical reasoning is merely logic applied to observation upon form and quantity. The great error lies in supposing that even the truths of what is called pure algebra, are abstract or general truths. And this error is so egregious that I am confounded at the universality with which it has been received. Mathematical axioms are not axioms of general truth. What is true of relation--of form and quantity--is often grossly false in regard to morals, for example. In this latter science it is very usually untrue that the aggregated parts are equal to the whole. In chemistry also the axiom fails. In the consideration of motive it fails; for two motives, each of a given value, have not, necessarily, a value when united, equal to the sum of their values apart. There are numerous other mathematical truths which are only truths within the limits of relation. But the mathematician argues, from his finite truths, through habit, as if they were of an absolutely general applicability--as the world indeed imagines them to be. Bryant, in his very learned ‘Mythology,’ mentions an analogous source of error, when he says that ‘although the Pagan fables are not believed, yet we forget ourselves continually, and make inferences from them as existing realities.’ With the algebraists, however, who are Pagans themselves, the ‘Pagan fables’ are believed, and the inferences are made, not so much through lapse of memory, as through an unaccountable addling of the brains. In short, I never yet encountered the mere mathematician who could be trusted out of equal roots, or one who did not clandestinely hold it as a point of his faith that x2+px was absolutely and unconditionally equal to q. Say to one of these gentlemen, by way of experiment, if you please, that you believe occasions may occur where x2+px is not altogether equal to q, and, having made him understand what you mean, get out of his reach as speedily as convenient, for, beyond doubt, he will endeavor to knock you down.

“I mean to say,” continued Dupin, while I merely laughed at his last observations, “that if the Minister had been no more than a mathematician, the Prefect would have been under no necessity of giving me this check. I know him, however, as both mathematician and poet,

and my measures were adapted to his capacity, with reference to the circumstances by which he was surrounded. I knew him as a courtier, too, and as a bold intriguant. Such a man, I considered, could not fail to be aware of the ordinary policial modes of action. He could not have failed to anticipate--and events have proved that he did not fail to anticipate--the waylayings to which he was subjected. He must have foreseen, I reflected, the secret investigations of his premises. His frequent absences from home at night, which were hailed by the Prefect as certain aids to his success, I regarded only as ruses, to afford opportunity for thorough search to the police, and thus the sooner to impress them with the conviction to which G--, in fact, did finally arrive--the conviction that the letter was not upon the premises. I felt, also, that the whole train of thought, which I was at some pains in detailing to you just now, concerning the invariable principle of policial action in searches for articles concealed--I felt that this whole train of thought would necessarily pass through the mind of the Minister. It would imperatively lead him to despise all the ordinary nooks of concealment. He could not, I reflected, be so weak as not to see that the most intricate and remote recess of his hotel would be as open as his commonest closets to the eyes, to the probes, to the gimlets, and to the microscopes of the Prefect. I saw, in fine, that he would be driven, as a matter of course, to simplicity, if not deliberately induced to it as a matter of choice. You will remember, perhaps, how desperately the Prefect laughed when I suggested, upon our first interview, that it was just possible this mystery troubled him so much on account of its being so very self-evident."

"Yes," said I, "I remember his merriment well. I really thought he would have fallen into convulsions."

"The material world," continued Dupin, "abounds with very strict analogies to the immaterial; and thus some color of truth has been given to the rhetorical dogma, that metaphor, or simile, may be made to strengthen an argument, as well as to embellish a description. The principle of the vis inertiæ, for example, seems to be identical in physics and metaphysics. It is not more true in the former, that a large body is with more difficulty set in motion than a smaller one, and that its subsequent momentum is commensurate with this difficulty, than it is, in the latter, that intellects of the vaster capacity, while more forcible, more constant, and more eventful in their movements than those of inferior grade, are yet the less readily moved, and more embarrassed and full of hesitation in the first few steps of their progress. Again: have you ever noticed which of the street signs, over the shop-doors, are the most attractive of attention?"

"I have never given the matter a thought," I said.

“There is a game of puzzles,” he resumed, “which is played upon a map. One party playing requires another to find a given word--the name of town, river, state or empire--any word, in short, upon the motley and perplexed surface of the chart. A novice in the game generally seeks to embarrass his opponents by giving them the most minutely lettered names; but the adept selects such words as stretch, in large characters, from one end of the chart to the other. These, like the over-largely lettered signs and placards of the street, escape observation by dint of being excessively obvious; and here the physical oversight is precisely analogous with the moral inapprehension by which the intellect suffers to pass unnoticed those considerations which are too obtrusively and too palpably self-evident. But this is a point, it appears, somewhat above or beneath the understanding of the Prefect. He never once thought it probable, or possible, that the Minister had deposited the letter immediately beneath the nose of the whole world, by way of best preventing any portion of that world from perceiving it.

“But the more I reflected upon the daring, dashing, and discriminating ingenuity of D--; upon the fact that the document must always have been at hand, if he intended to use it to good purpose; and upon the decisive evidence, obtained by the Prefect, that it was not hidden within the limits of that dignitary’s ordinary search--the more satisfied I became that, to conceal this letter, the Minister had resorted to the comprehensive and sagacious expedient of not attempting to conceal it at all.

“Full of these ideas, I prepared myself with a pair of green spectacles, and called one fine morning, quite by accident, at the Ministerial hotel. I found D-- at home, yawning, lounging, and dawdling, as usual, and pretending to be in the last extremity of ennui. He is, perhaps, the most really energetic human being now alive--but that is only when nobody sees him.

“To be even with him, I complained of my weak eyes, and lamented the necessity of the spectacles, under cover of which I cautiously and thoroughly surveyed the whole apartment, while seemingly intent only upon the conversation of my host.

“I paid especial attention to a large writing-table near which he sat, and upon which lay confusedly, some miscellaneous letters and other papers, with one or two musical instruments and a few books. Here, however, after a long and very deliberate scrutiny, I saw nothing to excite particular suspicion.

“At length my eyes, in going the circuit of the room, fell upon a

trumpery fillagree card-rack of pasteboard, that hung dangling by a dirty blue ribbon, from a little brass knob just beneath the middle of the mantel-piece. In this rack, which had three or four compartments, were five or six visiting cards and a solitary letter. This last was much soiled and crumpled. It was torn nearly in two, across the middle--as if a design, in the first instance, to tear it entirely up as worthless, had been altered, or stayed, in the second. It had a large black seal, bearing the D-- cipher very conspicuously, and was addressed, in a diminutive female hand, to D--, the minister, himself. It was thrust carelessly, and even, as it seemed, contemptuously, into one of the uppermost divisions of the rack.

“No sooner had I glanced at this letter, than I concluded it to be that of which I was in search. To be sure, it was, to all appearance, radically different from the one of which the Prefect had read us so minute a description. Here the seal was large and black, with the D-- cipher; there it was small and red, with the ducal arms of the S-- family. Here, the address, to the Minister, diminutive and feminine; there the superscription, to a certain royal personage, was markedly bold and decided; the size alone formed a point of correspondence. But, then, the radicalness of these differences, which was excessive; the dirt; the soiled and torn condition of the paper, so inconsistent with the true methodical habits of D--, and so suggestive of a design to delude the beholder into an idea of the worthlessness of the document; these things, together with the hyper-obtrusive situation of this document, full in the view of every visiter, and thus exactly in accordance with the conclusions to which I had previously arrived; these things, I say, were strongly corroborative of suspicion, in one who came with the intention to suspect.

“I protracted my visit as long as possible, and, while I maintained a most animated discussion with the Minister upon a topic which I knew well had never failed to interest and excite him, I kept my attention really riveted upon the letter. In this examination, I committed to memory its external appearance and arrangement in the rack; and also fell, at length, upon a discovery which set at rest whatever trivial doubt I might have entertained. In scrutinizing the edges of the paper, I observed them to be more chafed than seemed necessary. They presented the broken appearance which is manifested when a stiff paper, having been once folded and pressed with a folder, is refolded in a reversed direction, in the same creases or edges which had formed the original fold. This discovery was sufficient. It was clear to me that the letter had been turned, as a glove, inside out, re-directed, and re-sealed. I bade the Minister good morning, and took my departure at once, leaving a gold snuff-box upon the table.

“The next morning I called for the snuff-box, when we resumed, quite eagerly, the conversation of the preceding day. While thus engaged, however, a loud report, as if of a pistol, was heard immediately beneath the windows of the hotel, and was succeeded by a series of fearful screams, and the shoutings of a terrified mob. D-- rushed to a casement, threw it open, and looked out. In the meantime, I stepped to the card-rack, took the letter, put it in my pocket, and replaced it by a fac-simile, (so far as regards externals,) which I had carefully prepared at my lodgings--imitating the D-- cipher, very readily, by means of a seal formed of bread.

“The disturbance in the street had been occasioned by the frantic behavior of a man with a musket. He had fired it among a crowd of women and children. It proved, however, to have been without ball, and the fellow was suffered to go his way as a lunatic or a drunkard. When he had gone, D-- came from the window, whither I had followed him immediately upon securing the object in view. Soon afterwards I bade him farewell. The pretended lunatic was a man in my own pay.”

“But what purpose had you,” I asked, “in replacing the letter by a fac-simile? Would it not have been better, at the first visit, to have seized it openly, and departed?”

“D--,” replied Dupin, “is a desperate man, and a man of nerve. His hotel, too, is not without attendants devoted to his interests. Had I made the wild attempt you suggest, I might never have left the Ministerial presence alive. The good people of Paris might have heard of me no more. But I had an object apart from these considerations. You know my political prepossessions. In this matter, I act as a partisan of the lady concerned. For eighteen months the Minister has had her in his power. She has now him in hers--since, being unaware that the letter is not in his possession, he will proceed with his exactions as if it was. Thus will he inevitably commit himself, at once, to his political destruction. His downfall, too, will not be more precipitate than awkward. It is all very well to talk about the facilis descensus Averni; but in all kinds of climbing, as Catalani said of singing, it is far more easy to get up than to come down. In the present instance I have no sympathy--at least no pity--for him who descends. He is that monstrum horrendum, an unprincipled man of genius. I confess, however, that I should like very well to know the precise character of his thoughts, when, being defied by her whom the Prefect terms ‘a certain personage’ he is reduced to opening the letter which I left for him in the card-rack.”

“How? did you put any thing particular in it?”

“Why--it did not seem altogether right to leave the interior blank--that would have been insulting. D--, at Vienna once, did me an evil turn, which I told him, quite good-humoredly, that I should remember. So, as I knew he would feel some curiosity in regard to the identity of the person who had outwitted him, I thought it a pity not to give him a clue. He is well acquainted with my MS., and I just copied into the middle of the blank sheet the words--

“‘-- -- *Un dessein si funeste, S’il n’est digne d’Atrée, est digne de Thyeste.* They are to be found in Crebillon’s ‘Atrée.’”

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# A Question of Identity

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*Minute Mysteries*, by Harold Austin Ripley

Professor Fordney and three of his friends were enjoying their weekly ‘get together’ at the University Club.

‘Professor,’ said Patrie, ‘tell us something about that Yelpir murder case you were working on.’

‘Well, gentlemen,’ he replied, in his retiring manner, ‘as you know, Yelpir’s affairs were common knowledge, and the fact that several women had reasons to wish him dead complicated matters a bit.

‘His body was found in his study, which opened on to a corridor. At the other end of the corridor and directly opposite it a staircase led to the servants’ quarters above.

‘Diana Lane, a house guest of Mrs. Yelpir at the time of the murder, was questioned, and she appeared nervous. She insisted, however, that she had been in her room at the time Yelpir was slain.

‘Nora, a servant, testified that, as she was descending the stairs leading from the servants’ quarters, at midnight, she saw Diana Lane, wearing her famous emerald pendant and dressed in an enticing black negligée, walk down the lighted corridor to Yelpir’s room. She said she followed a minute later and heard Diana and Yelpir violently quarreling. She returned to the servants’ quarters and, as she opened the door of her room, she heard a shot.

‘In the face of such evidence, Miss Lane admitted having gone to the study at the time, but protested her innocence, declaring she had

remained only a minute.

‘While Miss Lane was acquitted, you know, her reputation was not above reproach. Even so, I knew without further investigation that Nora’s testimony was maliciously false.’

How did the Professor know?

[Editor: The answer is at the bottom of this collection. Don't peek!]

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# The Riddle of Ragstaff

by Sax Rohmer
The Project Gutenberg eBook,
*The Haunting of Low Fennel*

I

"Well, Harry, my boy, and what's the latest news from Venice?"

Harry Lorian stretched his long legs and lay back in his chair.

"I had a letter from the governor this morning, Colonel. He appears to be filling his portfolio with studies of windows and doorways and stair-rails and the other domestic necessities dear to his architectural soul!"

Colonel Reynor laughed in his short, gruff way, as my friend, Lorian, gazing sleepily about the quaint old hall in which we sat, but always bringing his gaze to one point--a certain door--blew rings of smoke straightly upward.

"I suppose," said our host, the Colonel, "most of the material will be used for the forthcoming book?"

"I suppose so," drawled Lorian, glancing for the twentieth time at the yet vacant doorway by the stair-foot. "The idea of architects and artists and other constitutionally languid people, having to write books, fills my soul with black horror."

"He had a glorious time with our old panelling, Harry," laughed the

Colonel, waving his cigar vaguely toward the panelled walls and nooks which gradually were receding into the twilight.

"Yes," said my friend. "He was here quite an unconscionable time--even for an old school chum of the proprietor. I hope you counted the spoons when he left!"

Lorian's disrespectful references to Sir Julius, his father, were characteristic; for he reverences that famous artist with the double love of a son and a pupil.

"Of course we did," chuckled Reynor. "Nothing missing, my boy!"

"That's funny," drawled Lorian. "Because if he didn't steal it from here I can't imagine from where he stole it!"

"Stole what, Harry?"

"Whatever some chap broke into his studio for last night!"

"Eh!" cried the Colonel, sitting suddenly very upright. "Into your father's studio? Burglars?"

"Suppose so," was the reply. "They took nothing that I was aware to be in his possession, though the place was ransacked. I naturally concluded that they had taken something that I was _unaware_ to be in his----Ah!"

Sybil Reynor entered by the door which, for the past twenty minutes, had been the focus of Lorian's gaze. The gathering dusk precluded the possibility of my seeing with certainty, but I think her face flushed as her dark eyes rested upon my friend. Her beauty is not of the kind which needs deceptive half-lights to perfect it, but there in the dimness, as she came towards us, she looked very lovely and divinely graceful. I did not envy Lorian his good fortune; but I suppressed a sigh when I saw how my existence had escaped the girl's notice and how the world in her eyes, contained only a Henry Lorian, R.I.

Her mother entered shortly afterwards and a general conversation arose, which continued until the arrival of Ralph Edie and his sister. They were accompanied by Felix Hulme; and their advent completed the small party expected at Ragstaff Park.

"You late arrivals," said Lorian, "have only just time to dress, unless you want to miss everything but the nuts!"

"Oh, Harry!" said Mrs. Reynor, "you are as bad as your father!"

"Worse," said Lorian promptly. "I am altogether more rude and have a bigger appetite!"

With such seeming trivialities, then, opened the drama of Ragstaff, the drama in which Fate had cast four of us for leading rôles.

## II

Following dinner, the men--or, as my friend has it, "the gunners"--drifted into the hall. The hall at Ragstaff Park is fitted as a smoking lounge. It dates back to Tudor days and affords some magnificent examples of mediæval panelling. At every point the eye meets the device of a man with a ragged staff--from which the place derives its name, and which is the crest of the Reynors.

A conversation took place to which, at the time, I attached small importance, but which, later, assumed a certain significance.

"Extraordinary business," said Felix Hulme--"that attempted burglary at Sir Julius's studio last night."

"Yes," replied Lorian. "Who told you?"

Hulme appeared to be confused by the abrupt question.

"Oh," he replied, "I heard of it from Baxter, who has the next studio, you know."

"When did you see Baxter?" asked Lorian casually.

"This morning."

"I suppose," said Colonel Reynor to my friend, "a number of your father's drawings are there?"

"Yes," answered Lorian slowly; "but the more valuable ones I have at my own studio, including those intended for use in his book."

Something in his tone caused me to glance hard at him.

"You don't think they were the burglar's objective?" I suggested.

"Hardly," was the reply. "They would be worthless to a thief."

"First I've heard of this attempt, Lorian," said Edie. "Anything missing?"

"No. The thing is an utter mystery. There were some odds and ends lying about which no ordinary burglar could very well have overlooked."

"If any loss had been sustained," said the Colonel, half jestingly, "I should have put it down to the Riddle!"

"Don't quite follow you. Colonel," remarked Edie. "What riddle?"

"The family Riddle of the Ragstaffs," explained Lorian. "You've seen it--over there by the staircase."

"Oh!" exclaimed the other, "you mean that inscription on the panel--which means nothing in particular? Yes, I have examined it several times. But why should it affect the fortunes of Sir Julius?"

"You see," was the Colonel's reply, "we have a tradition in the family, Edie, that the Riddle brings us luck, but brings misfortune to anyone else who has it in his possession. It's never been copied before; but I let Lorian--Sir Julius--make a drawing of it for his forthcoming book on Decorative Wood-carving. I don't know," he added smilingly, "if the mysterious influence follows the copy or only appertains to the original."

"Let us have another look at it," said Edie. "It has acquired a new interest!"

The whole party of us passed idly across the hall to the foot of the great staircase. From the direction of the drawing-room proceeded the softly played strains of the _Duetto_ from _Cavalleria_. I knew Sybil Reynor was the player, and I saw Lorian glance impatiently in the direction of the door. Hulme detected the glance, too, and an expression rested momentarily upon his handsome face which I found myself at a loss to define.

"You see," said the Colonel, holding a candle close to the time-blackened panel, "it is a meaningless piece of mediæval doggerel roughly carved in the wood. The oak-leaf border is very fine, so your father tells me, Harry"--to Lorian--"but it is probably the work of another hand, as is the man and ragged staff which form the shield at the top."

"Has it ever occurred to you," asked Hulme, "that the writing might be of a very much later date--late Stuart, for instance?"

"No," replied the Colonel abruptly, and turned away. "I am sure it is earlier than that."

I was not the only member of the party who noticed the curt tone of his reply; and when we had all retired for the night I lingered in Lorian's room and reverted to the matter.

"Is the late Stuart period a sore point with the Colonel?" I asked.

Lorian, who was in an unusually thoughtful mood, lighted his pipe and nodded.

"It is said," he explained, "that a Reynor at about that time turned buccaneer and became the terror of the two Atlantics! I don't know what possessed Hulme to say such a thing. Probably he doesn't know about the piratical page in the family records, however. He's a strange chap."

"He is," I agreed. "Everybody seems to know him, yet nobody knows anything _about_ him. I first met him at the Travellers' Club. I was unaware, until I came down here this time, that the Colonel was one of his friends."

"Edie brought him down first," replied Lorian. "But I think Hulme had met Sybil--Miss Reynor--in London, before. I may be a silly ass, but somehow I distrust the chap--always have. He seems to know altogether too much about other people's affairs."

I mentally added that he also took too great an interest in a certain young lady to suit Lorian's taste. We chatted upon various matters--principally upon the manners, customs, and manifold beauties of Sybil Reynor--until my friend's pipe went out. Then I bade him good night and went to my own room.

## III

With that abruptness characteristic of the coast and season, a high wind had sprung up since the party had separated. Now a continuous booming filled the night, telling how the wrath of the North Atlantic spent itself upon the western rocks.

To a town-dweller, more used to the vaguely soothing hum of the metropolis, this grander music of the elements was a poor sedative. Sleep evaded me, tired though I was, and I presently found myself drifting into that uncomfortable frame of mind between dreaming and

waking, wherein one's brain becomes a torturing parrot-house, filled with some meaningless reiteration.

"The riddle of the ragged staff--the riddle of the ragged staff," was the phrase that danced maddeningly through my brain. It got to that pass with me, familiar enough to victims of insomnia, when the words began to go to a sort of monotonous melody.

Thereupon, I determined to light a candle and read for a while, in the hope of inducing slumber.

The old clock down in the hall proclaimed the half-hour. I glanced at my watch. It was half-past one. The moaning of the wind and the wild song of the sea continued unceasingly.

Then I dropped my paper--and listened.

Amid the mighty sounds which raged about Ragstaff Park it was one slight enough which had attracted my attention. But in the elemental music there was a sameness which rendered it, after a time, negligible. Indeed, I think sleep was not far off when this new sound detached itself from the old--like the solo from its accompaniment.

Something had fallen, crashingly, within the house.

It might be some object insecurely fastened which had been detached in the breeze from an open window. And, realising this, I waited and listened.

For some minutes the wind and the waves alone represented sound. Then my
ears, attuned to this stormy conflict, and sensitive to anything apart from it, detected a faint scratching and tapping.

My room was the first along the corridor leading to the west wing, and therefore the nearest to the landing immediately above the hall. I determined that this mysterious disturbance proceeded from downstairs. At another time, perhaps, I might have neglected it, but to-night, and so recently following upon Lorian's story of the attempt upon his father's studio, I found myself keenly alive to the burglarious possibilities of Ragstaff.

I got out of bed, put on my slippers, and, having extinguished the candle, was about to open the door when I observed a singular thing.

A strong light--which could not be that of the moon, for ordinarily the

corridor beyond was dark--shone under the door!

Even as I looked in amazement it was gone.

Very softly I turned the knob.

Careful as I was, it slipped from my grasp with a faint _click_. To this, I think, I owed my failure to see more than I did see. But what I saw was sufficiently remarkable.

Cloud-banks raced across the sky tempestuously, and, as I peered over the oaken balustrade down into the hall, one of these impinged upon the moon's disc and, within the space of two seconds or less, had wholly obscured it. Upon where a long, rectangular patch of light, splashed with lozenge-shaped shadows spread from a mullioned window across the polished floor, crept a band of blackness--widened--claimed half--claimed the whole--and left the hall in darkness.

Yet, in the half-second before the coming of the cloud, and as I first looked down, I had seen something--something indefinable. All but immediately it was lost in the quick gliding shadow--yet I could be sure that I had seen--what?

A gleaming, metallic streak--almost I had said a sword--which leapt from my view into the bank of gloom!

Passing the cloud, and the moon anew cutting a line of light through the darkness of the hall, nothing, no one, remained to be seen. I might have imagined the presence of the shining blade, rod, or whatever had seemed to glitter in the moon-rays; and I should have felt assured that such was the case but for the suspicion (and it was nearly a certainty) that a part of the shadow which had enwrapped the mysterious appearance had been of greater depth than the rest--more tangible; in short, had been no shadow, but a substance--the form of one who lurked there.

Doubtful how to act, and unwilling to disturb the house without good reason, I stood hesitating at the head of the stairs.

A grating sound, like that of a rusty lock, and clearly distinguishable above the noise occasioned by the wind, came to my ears. I began slowly and silently to descend the stairs.

At the foot I paused, looking warily about me. There was no one in the hall.

A new cloud swept across the face of the moon, and utter darkness

surrounded me again. I listened intently, but nothing stirred.

Briefly I searched all those odd nooks and corners in which the rambling place abounded, but without discovering anything to account for the phenomena which had brought me there at that hour of the night. The big doors were securely bolted, as were all the windows. Extremely puzzled, I returned to my room and to bed.

In the morning I said nothing to our host respecting the mysterious traffic of the night, since nothing appeared to be disturbed in any way.

"Did you hear it blowing?" asked Colonel Reynor during breakfast. "The booming of the waves sounded slap under the house. Good job the wind has dropped this morning."

It was, indeed, a warm and still morning, when on the moorland strip beyond the long cornfield, where the thick fir-tufts marked the warren honeycomb, partridges might be met with in many coveys, basking in the sandy patches.

There were tunnels through the dense bushes to the west, too, which led one with alarming suddenness to the very brink of the cliff. And here went scurrying many a hare before the armed intruder.

Lorian and I worked around by lunch-time to the spinneys east of the cornfield, and, nothing loath to partake of the substantial hospitalities of Ragstaff, made our way up to the house. There is a kind of rock-garden from which you must approach from that side. It affords an uninterrupted view of the lower part of the grounds from the lawn up to the terrace.

Only two figures were in sight; and they must have been invisible from any other point, as we, undoubtedly, were invisible to them.

They were those of a man and a girl. They stood upon the steps leading down from the lawn to the rose-garden. It was impossible to misunderstand the nature of the words which the man was speaking. But I saw the girl turn aside and shake her head. The man sought to take her hand and received a further and more decided rebuff.

We hurried on. Lorian, though I avoided looking directly at him, was biting his lip. He was very pale, too. And I knew that he had recognized, as I had recognized, Sybil Reynor and Felix Hulme.

## IV

During lunch, a Mr. Findon, who had driven over with one of the Colonel's neighbours, asked Sybil Reynor whether the peculiar and far from beautiful ring which she invariably wore was Oriental. From his conversation I gathered that he was something of an expert.

"It is generally supposed to be Phoenician, Mr. Findon," she answered; and slipping it from her finger she passed it to him. "It is my lot in life to wear it always, hideous though it is!"

"Indeed! An heirloom, I suppose?"

"Yes," replied the girl; "and an ugly one."

In point of fact, the history of the ring was as curious as that of the Riddle. For generations it had been worn by the heir of Ragstaff from the day of his majority to that of his eldest son's. Colonel Reynor had no son. Hence, following the tradition as closely as circumstances allowed, he had invested Sybil with the ring upon the day that she came of age--some three months prior to the time of which I write.

As Mr. Findon was about to return the ring, Lorian said:

"Excuse me. May I examine it for a moment?"

"Of course," replied Sybil.

He took it in his hand and bent over it curiously. I cannot pretend to explain what impelled me to glance towards Hulme at that moment; but I did do so. And the expression which rested upon his dark and usually handsome face positively alarmed me.

I concluded that, beneath the cool surface, he was a man of hot passions, and I would have ascribed the fixed glare to the jealousy of a rejected suitor in presence of a more favoured rival, had it centred upon Lorian. But it appeared to be focused, particularly, upon the ring.

The incident impressed me very unfavourably. A sense of mystery was growing up around me--pervading the atmosphere of Ragstaff Park.

After lunch Lorian and I again set out in company, but my friend appeared to be in anything but sporting humour. We bore off at a sharp angle from the Colonel and some others who were set upon the rough shooting on the western rim of the moors and made for the honeycombed ground which led one upward to the cliff edge.

Abruptly, we found ourselves upon the sheer brink, with the floor of the ocean at our feet and all the great Atlantic before us.

"Let us relent of our murderous purpose," said Lorian, dropping comfortably on to a patch of velvety turf and producing his pipe. "I have dragged you up here with the malicious intention of talking to you."

I was not sorry to hear it. There was much that I wished to discuss with him.

"I should have stayed to say something to some one," he added, carefully stuffing his briar, "but first I wanted to say something to you." He paused, fumbling for matches. "What," he continued, finding some and striking one, "is Felix Hulme's little game?"

"He wants to marry Miss Reynor."

"I know; but he needn't get so infernally savage because she won't accept him. He looked at me in a positively murderous way at lunch to-day."

"So you noticed that?"

"Yes--and I saw that you noticed it, too."

"Listen," I said. "Leaving Hulme out of the question, there is an altogether more mysterious business afoot." And I told him of the episode of the previous night.

He smoked stolidly whilst I spoke, frowning the while; then:

"Old chap," he said, "I begin to have a sort of glimmering of intelligence. I believe I am threatened with an idea! But it's such an utterly fantastic hybrid that I dare not name it--yet."

He asked me several questions respecting what I had seen, and my replies appeared to confirm whatever suspicion was gathering in his mind. We saw little enough sport, but came in later than anyone.

During dinner there was an odd incident. Lorian said:

"Colonel, d'you mind my taking a picture of the Riddle?"

"Eh!" said the Colonel. "What for? Your father made a drawing of it."

"Yes, I know," replied Lorian. "I mean a photograph."

"Well," mused the Colonel, "I don't know that there can be much objection, since it has been copied once. But have you got a camera here?"

"Ah--no," said my friend thoughtfully, "I haven't. Can anybody lend me one?"

Apparently no one could.

"If you care to drive over to Dr. Mason's after dinner," said our host, "he will lend you one. He has several."

Lorian said he would, and I volunteered to accompany him. Accordingly the Colonel's high dogcart was prepared; and beneath a perfect moon, swimming in a fleckless sky which gave no hint of the storm to come, we set off for the doctor's.

My friend's manoeuvres were a constant source of surprise to me. However, I allowed him to know his own business best, and employed my mind with speculations respecting this mystery, what time the Colonel's spirited grey whisked us along the dusty roads.

We had just wheeled around Dr. Mason's drive, when the fact broke in upon my musings that a Stygian darkness had descended upon the night, as though the moon had been snuffed, candle-wise.

"Devil of a storm brewing," said Lorian. "Funny how the weather changes at night."

Two minutes after entering the doctor's cosy study, down came the rain.

"Now we're in for it!" said Mason. "I'll send Wilkins to run the dogcart into the stable until it blows over."

The storm proved to be a severe one; and long past midnight, despite the doctor's hospitable attempts to detain us, we set off for Ragstaff Park.

"We can put up the grey ourselves," said Lorian. "I love grooming horses! And by going around into the yard and throwing gravel up at his window, we can awaken Peters without arousing the house. This plan almost startles me by its daring originality. I fear that I detect within myself the symptoms of genius."

So, with one of Dr. Mason's cameras under the seat, we started back

through the sweet-smelling lanes; and, at about twenty minutes past one, swung past the gate lodge and up the long avenue, the wheels grinding crisply upon the newly wetted gravel. There was but little moon, now, and the house stood up, an irregular black mass, before us.

Then, from three of the windows, there suddenly leapt out a dazzling white light!

Lorian pulled up the grey with a jerk.

"Good God!" he said. "What's that! An explosion!"

But no sound reached us. Only, for some seconds, the hard, white glare streamed out upon the steps and down on to the drive. Suddenly as it had come--it was gone, and the whole of Ragstaff was in darkness as before!

The horse started nervously, but my friend held him with a firm hand, turning and looking at me queerly.

"That's what shone under your door last night!" he said. "That light was in the hall!"

## V

Peters was awakened, the horse stabled and ourselves admitted without arousing another soul. As we came around from the back of the house (we had not entered by the main door), and, candles in hand, passed through the hall, nothing showed as having been disturbed.

"Don't breathe a word of our suspicions to anyone," counselled Lorian.

"What _are_ our suspicions?" said I.

"At present," he replied, "indefinable."

To-night the distant murmur of the sea proved very soothing, and I slept soundly. I was early afoot, however, but not so early as Lorian. As I passed around the gallery above the hall, on my way to the bathroom, I saw him folding up the tripod of the camera which he had borrowed from Dr. Mason. The morning sun was streaming through the windows.

"Hullo!" Lorian called to me. "I've got a splendid negative, I think. Peters is rigging up a dark-room in the wine-cellar--delightful site for the purpose! Will you join me in developing?"

Although I was unable to conjecture what my friend hoped to gain by his photographic experiments, I agreed, prompted as much by curiosity as anything else. So, after my tub, I descended to the cellar and splashed about in Hypo., until Lorian declared himself satisfied.

"The second is the best," he pronounced critically, holding the negative up to the red lamp. "I made three exposures in all; but the reflection from the polished wood has rather spoiled the first and also the third."

"Whatever do you want with this photograph, anyway," I said, "when the original is available?"

"My dear chap," he replied, "one cannot squat in the hall fixedly regarding a section of panel like some fakir staring at a palm leaf!"

"Then you intend to study it?"

"Closely!"

As a matter of fact, he did not join us during the whole of the day; but since he spent the greater part of the time in his own room, I did not proffer my aid. From a remark dropped by the Colonel, I gathered that Sybil had volunteered to assist, during the afternoon, in preparing prints.

I was one of the first in to tea, and Lorian came racing out to meet me.

"Not a word yet," he said, "but if the Colonel is agreeable, I shall tell them all at dinner!"

"Tell them what?" I began----

Then I saw Sybil Reynor standing in the shadow of the porch, and, even from that distance, saw her rosy blushes.

I understood.

"Lucky man!" I cried, and wrung his hand warmly. "The very best of good wishes, old chap. I am delighted!"

"So am I!" replied Lorian. "But come and see the print."

We went into the house together; and Sybil blushed more furiously than ever when I told her how I envied Lorian--and added that he deserved the most beautiful girl in England, and had won her.

Lorian had a very clear print of the photograph pinned up to dry on the side of his window.

"We shall be busy to-night!" he said mysteriously.

He had planned to preserve his great secret until dinner-time; but, of course, it came out whilst we sat over tea on the balcony. The Colonel was unfeignedly delighted, and there is nothing secretive about Colonel Reynor. Consequently, five minutes after he had been informed how matters were between his daughter and Lorian, all the house knew.

I studied the face of Hulme, to see how he would take the news. But he retained a perfect mastery of himself, though his large dark eyes gleamed at discord with the smile which he wore.

Our photographic experiments were forgotten; and throughout dinner, whereat Sybil looked exquisitely lovely and very shy, and Lorian preserved an unruffled countenance, other topics ruled.

It was late before we found ourselves alone in Lorian's room, with the print spread upon the table beneath the light of the shaded lamp.

We bent over it.

"Now," said Lorian, "I assume that this is some kind of cipher!"

I stared at him surprisedly.

"And," he continued, "you and I are going to solve it if we sit up all night!"

"How do you propose to begin?"

"Well, as it appears to mean nothing in particular, as it stands, I thought of beginning by assuming that the letters have other values altogether. Therefore, upon the basis that _e_ is the letter which most frequently occurs in English, with _a_, _o_, _i_, _d_, _h_, _n_, _r_, afterwards, I had thought of resolving it into its component letters."

"But would that rule apply to mediæval English?"

"Ah," said Lorian thoughtfully, "most sage counsellor! A wise and timely thought! I'm afraid it wouldn't."

"What now?"

Lorian scratched his head in perplexity.

"Suppose," he suggested, "we write down the words plainly, and see if, treating each one separately, we can find other meanings to them."

Accordingly, upon a sheet of paper, I wrote:

> Wherso eer thee doome bee
> Looke untoe ye strypped tree
> Offe ragged staffe. Upon itte ley
> Golde toe greene ande kay toe kay.

Our efforts in the proposed direction were rewarded with poor success. Some gibberish even less intelligible than the original was the only result of our labour.

Lorian threw down his pencil and began to reload his pipe.

"Let us consider possible meanings to the original words," he said. "Do you know of anything in the neighbourhood which might answer to the description of a 'strypped tree'?"

I shook my head.

"What has occasioned your sudden interest in the thing?" I asked wearily.

"It is a long story," he replied; "and I have an idea that there's no time to be lost in solving the Riddle!"

However, even Lorian's enthusiasm flagged at last. We were forced to admit ourselves hopelessly beaten by the Riddle. I went to my own room feeling thoroughly tired. But I was not destined to sleep long. A few minutes after closing my eyes (or so it seemed), came a clamouring at the door.

I stumbled sleepily out of bed, and, slipping on my dressing-gown, admitted Lorian. Colonel Reynor stood immediately behind him.

"Most extraordinary business!" began the latter breathlessly. "Sybil had--_you_ tell him, Harry!"

"Well," said Lorian, "it is not unexpected! Listen: Sybil woke up a while ago, with the idea that she had forgotten something or lost something--you know the frame of mind! She went to her dressing-table and found the family ring missing!"

"_The_ ring!" burst in the Colonel excitedly. "Amazing!"

"She remembered having taken it off, during the evening, to--er--to put another one on! But she was unable to recall having replaced it. She determined to run down and see if she had left it upon the seat in the corner of the library. Well, she went downstairs in her dressing-gown, and, carrying a candle, very quietly, in order to wake no one, crossed to the library and searched unavailingly. She heard a faint noise outside in the hall."

Lorian paused. Felix Hulme had joined the party.

"What's the disturbance?" he asked.

"Oh," said Lorian, turning to him, "it's about Sybil. She was down in the library a while ago to look for something, and heard a sort of grating sound out in the hall. She came out, and almost fell over an iron-bound chest, about a foot and a half long, which stood near the bottom of the staircase!"

"Good heavens, Lorian!" I cried, "how had it come there?"

"Sybil says," he resumed, "that she could not believe her eyes. She stooped to examine the thing ... and with a thrill of horror saw it to be roughly marked _with a skull and cross-bones_!"

"My dear Lorian," said Hulme, "are you certain that Miss Reynor was awake?"

"She woke _us_ quickly enough!" interrupted the Colonel. "Poor girl, she was shaking dreadfully. Thought it was a supernatural appearance. She's with her mother now."

"But the box!" I cried. "Where is the box?"

"That's the mystery," answered Colonel Reynor. "I was downstairs two minutes later, and there was nothing of the kind to be seen! Has our Ragstaff ghost started walking again, I wonder? You ought to know, Hulme; you're in the Turret Room--that is the authentic haunted chamber!"

"I was aroused by the bell ringing," replied Hulme. "I am a very light sleeper. But I heard or saw nothing supernatural."

"By the way, Hulme," said my friend, "the Turret Room is directly above

the hall. I have a theory. Might I come up with you for a moment?"

"Certainly," replied Hulme.

We all went up to the Turret Room. Having climbed the stairs to this apartment, you enter it by descending three steps. It is octagonal and panelled all around. My friend tapped the panels and sounded all the oaken floor-boards. Then, professing himself satisfied, he bade Hulme good night, and accompanied me to my room.

## VI

Ragstaff Park slumbered once more. But Lorian sat upon the edge of my bed, smoking and thinking hard. He had been to his own room for the print of the Riddle, and it lay upon a chair before him.

"Listen to this," he said suddenly: "(_a_) Some one breaks into the governor's studio, and takes nothing. His drawings of the Ragstaff Riddle happen to be at my studio. (_b_) You hear a noise in the night, and see (1) a bright light; (2) a gleaming rod. (_c_) You and I see a bright light on the following night, and presumably proceeding from the same place; i.e., the hall. (_d_) Something I have not mentioned before--Hulme has a camera in his kit! And he doesn't want the fact known!"

"What do you mean?"

"I tested him the other night, by inquiring if anyone could lend me a camera. He did not volunteer! The morning following the mysterious business in the hall, observed by you, I saw a photographic printing frame in his window! He must have one of those portable developers with him."

"And to what does all this point?"

"To the fact that he has made at least three attempts to obtain a copy of the Riddle, and has at last succeeded!"

"Three!"

"I really think so. The evidence points to him as the person who broke into the studio. He made a bad slip. He referred to the matter, and cited Horace Baxter as his informant. Baxter is away!"

"But this is serious!"

"I should say so! He couldn't attempt to photograph the panel in daylight, so he employed magnesium ribbon at night! First time his tripod slipped. It is evidently one of the light, telescopic kind. His negative proved useless. It was one of the metal legs of the tripod which you saw shining! The second time he was more successful. That was the light of his magnesium ribbon you and I saw from the drive!"

"But, Lorian, I went down and searched the hall!"

"Now we come on to the, at present, conjectural part," explained Lorian. "My theory is that Hulme, somewhere or other, has come across some old documents which give the clue to those secret passages said to exist in Ragstaff, but which the Colonel has never been able to locate. I feel assured that there is some means of secret communication between the Turret Room and the hall. I further believe that Hulme has in some way got upon the track of another secret--that of the Riddle."

"But what _is_ the secret of the Riddle?"

"In my opinion the Riddle is a clue to another hiding-place, evidently not connected with the maze of passages; possibly what is known as a Priest's Hole. As you know, Hulme asked Sybil to marry him. I believe the man to be in financial straits; so that we must further assume the Riddle to conceal the whereabouts of a treasure, since the Reynors are far from wealthy."

"The _chest_! Lorian! The chest!" I cried.

"Quite so. But what immediately preceded its appearance? The loss of the family ring! If I am not greatly in error, Hulme found that ring! And the ring is the key to the riddle! Do you recall the shape of the bezel? Simply _a square peg of gold_! Look at the photograph!"

He was excited, for once.

"What does it say?" he continued: "'Ye strypped tree!' That means the device of leaves, twigs, and acorns--stripped _from_ a tree--see? Here, at the bottom of the panel, is such a group, and (this is where we have been so blind!) intertwined with the design is the word _CAEG_--Ancient Saxon for _key_! Look! 'Golde toe Greene and kay toe kay'! Amongst the _green_ leaves is a square hole. The _gold_ knob on the ring fits it!"

For a moment I was too greatly surprised for speech. Then:

"You think Hulme discovered this?"

"I do. And I think Sybil's mislaying her ring gave him his big chance. He had got the chest out whilst she was in the library. He must have been inside somewhere looking for it when she passed through the hall. Then, hearing her approach from the library, he was forced to abandon his heavy 'find' and hide in the secret passage which communicates with his room. Directly she ran upstairs he returned for the chest!"

I looked him hard in the face.

"We don't want a scene, Lorian," I began. "Besides, it's just possible you may be wrong."

"I agree," said Lorian. "Come up to his room, now."

Passing quietly upstairs, we paused before the door of the Turret Room. A faint light showed under it. Lorian glanced at me--then knocked.

"Who's there?" came sharply.

"Lorian," answered my friend. "I want a chat with you about the secret passage and the old treasure chest--_before speaking to the Colonel_!"

There was a long silence, then:

"Just a moment," came hoarsely. "Don't come in until I call."

We looked at one another doubtfully. A long minute passed. I could hear a faint sound within. At last came Hulme's voice:

"All right. Come in."

As Lorian threw the door open, a faint _click_ sounded from somewhere.

The Turret Room was empty!

"By heaven! he's given us the slip!" cried my friend.

We glanced around the room. A candle burnt upon the table. And upon the bed stood an iron-barred chest, with a sheet of notepaper lying on its lid!

Lorian pounced upon the note. We read it together.

"Mr. Henry Lorian" (it went), "I realize that you have found me out. I will confess that I had no time to open the chest. But as matters stand

I only ask you not to pursue me. I have taken nothing not my own. The ring, and an interesting document which I picked up some years ago, are on the table. Offer what explanation of my disappearance you please. I am in your hands."

We turned again to the table. Upon a piece of worn parchment lay the missing ring. Lorian spread out the parchment and bent over it.

"Why," I cried, "it is a plan of Ragstaff Park!"

"With a perfect network of secret passages!" added my friend, "and some instructions, apparently, as to how to enter them. It bears the initials 'R. R.' and, in brackets, 'Capt. S.' I begin to understand."

He raised the candle and stepped across to the ancient chest. It bore a roughly designed skull and cross-bones, and, in nearly defaced red characters, the words:

"_CAPTAIN SATAN_."

"Captain Satan!" I said. "He was one of the most bloodthirsty pirates who ever harried the Spanish Main!"

"He was," agreed Lorian; "and his real name was Roderick Reynor. He evidently solved the riddle some generations earlier than Hulme--and stored his bloodstained hoard in the ancient hiding-place. Also, you see, he knew about the passages."

"What shall we do?"

"Hulme has surrendered. You can see that the chest has not been opened. Therefore there is only one thing that we _can_ do. We must keep what we know to ourselves, return the chest to its hiding-place, and proclaim that we have found the missing ring!"

Down to the hall we bore the heavy chest. The square knob on the ring fitted, as Lorian had predicted, into the hole half hidden among the oak leaves of the design. Without much difficulty we forced back the fastening (it proved to be of a very simple pattern), and slid the whole panel aside. A small, square chamber was revealed by the light of the candle--quite empty.

"As I had surmised," said my friend; "a Priest's Hole."

We carried the chest within, and reclosed the panel, which came to with a sharp _click_.

*  *  *  *  *

The story which we invented to account for Hulme's sudden departure passed muster; for one topic usurped the interests of all--the ghostly box, with its piratical emblem.

"My boy," Colonel Reynor said to Lorian, "I cannot pretend to explain what Sybil saw. But it bears curiously upon a certain black page in the family history. If the chest had been tangible, and had contained a fortune, I would not have opened it. Let all pertaining to that part of our records remain buried, say I."

"Which determines our course," explained Lorian to me. "The chest is not ours, and the Colonel evidently would rather not know about it. I regret that I lack the morals of a burglar."

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# THE NEW ACCELERATOR

by H. G. Wells
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*Tales of the Unexpected*

Certainly, if ever a man found a guinea when he was looking for a pin, it is my good friend Professor Gibberne. I have heard before of investigators overshooting the mark, but never quite to the extent that he has done. He has really, this time at any rate, without any touch of exaggeration in the phrase, found something to revolutionise human life. And that when he was simply seeking an all-round nervous stimulant to bring languid people up to the stresses of these pushful days. I have tasted the stuff now several times, and I cannot do better than describe the effect the thing had on me. That there are astonishing experiences in store for all in search of new sensations will become apparent enough.

Professor Gibberne, as many people know, is my neighbour in Folkestone. Unless my memory plays me a trick, his portrait at various ages has already appeared in _The Strand Magazine_--I think late in 1899; but I am unable to look it up because I have lent that volume to some one who has never sent it back. The reader may, perhaps, recall the high forehead and the singularly long black eyebrows that give such a Mephistophelian touch to his face. He occupies one of those pleasant

little detached houses in the mixed style that make the western end of the Upper Sandgate Road so interesting. His is the one with the Flemish gables and the Moorish portico, and it is in the little room with the mullioned bay window that he works when he is down here, and in which of an evening we have so often smoked and talked together. He is a mighty jester, but, besides, he likes to talk to me about his work; he is one of those men who find a help and stimulus in talking, and so I have been able to follow the conception of the New Accelerator right up from a very early stage. Of course, the greater portion of his experimental work is not done in Folkestone, but in Gower Street, in the fine new laboratory next to the hospital that he has been the first to use.

As every one knows, or at least as all intelligent people know, the special department in which Gibberne has gained so great and deserved a reputation among physiologists is the action of drugs upon the nervous system. Upon soporifics, sedatives, and anæsthetics he is, I am told, unequalled. He is also a chemist of considerable eminence, and I suppose in the subtle and complex jungle of riddles that centres about the ganglion cell and the axis fibre there are little cleared places of his making, little glades of illumination, that, until he sees fit to publish his results, are still inaccessible to every other living man. And in the last few years he has been particularly assiduous upon this question of nervous stimulants, and already, before the discovery of the New Accelerator, very successful with them. Medical science has to thank him for at least three distinct and absolutely safe invigorators of unrivalled value to practising men. In cases of exhaustion the preparation known as Gibberne's B Syrup has, I suppose, saved more lives already than any lifeboat round the coast.

'But none of these little things begin to satisfy me yet,' he told me nearly a year ago. 'Either they increase the central energy without affecting the nerves, or they simply increase the available energy by lowering the nervous conductivity; and all of them are unequal and local in their operation. One wakes up the heart and viscera and leaves the brain stupefied, one gets at the brain champagne fashion, and does nothing good for the solar plexus, and what I want--and what, if it's an earthly possibility, I mean to have--is a stimulant that stimulates all round, that wakes you up for a time from the crown of your head to the tip of your great toe, and makes you go two--or even three--to everybody else's one. Eh? That's the thing I'm after.'

'It would tire a man,' I said.

'Not a doubt of it. And you'd eat double or treble--and all that. But just think what the thing would mean. Imagine yourself with a little

phial like this'--he held up a little bottle of green glass and marked his points with it--'and in this precious phial is the power to think twice as fast, move twice as quickly, do twice as much work in a given time as you could otherwise do.'

'But is such a thing possible?'

'I believe so. If it isn't, I've wasted my time for a year. These various preparations of the hypophosphites, for example, seem to show that something of the sort.... Even if it was only one and a half times as fast it would do.'

'It _would_ do,' I said.

'If you were a statesman in a corner, for example, time rushing up against you, something urgent to be done, eh?'

'He could dose his private secretary,' I said.

'And gain--double time. And think if _you_, for example, wanted to finish a book.'

'Usually,' I said, 'I wish I'd never begun 'em.'

'Or a doctor, driven to death, wants to sit down and think out a case. Or a barrister--or a man cramming for an examination.'

'Worth a guinea a drop,' said I, 'and more--to men like that.'

'And in a duel, again,' said Gibberne, 'where it all depends on your quickness in pulling the trigger.'

'Or in fencing,' I echoed.

'You see,' said Gibberne, 'if I get it as an all-round thing, it will really do you no harm at all--except perhaps to an infinitesimal degree it brings you nearer old age. You will just have lived twice to other people's once----'

'I suppose,' I meditated, 'in a duel--it would be fair?'

'That's a question for the seconds,' said Gibberne.

I harked back further. 'And you really think such a thing _is_ possible?' I said.

‘As possible,’ said Gibberne, and glanced at something that went throbbing by the window, ‘as a motor-bus. As a matter of fact----’

He paused and smiled at me deeply, and tapped slowly on the edge of his desk with the green phial. ‘I think I know the stuff.... Already I’ve got something coming.’ The nervous smile upon his face betrayed the gravity of his revelation. He rarely talked of his actual experimental work unless things were very near the end. ‘And it may be, it may be--I shouldn’t be surprised--it may even do the thing at a greater rate than twice.’

‘It will be rather a big thing,’ I hazarded.

‘It will be, I think, rather a big thing.’

But I don’t think he quite knew what a big thing it was to be, for all that.

I remember we had several talks about the stuff after that. ‘The New Accelerator’ he called it, and his tone about it grew more confident on each occasion. Sometimes he talked nervously of unexpected physiological results its use might have, and then he would get a little unhappy; at others he was frankly mercenary, and we debated long and anxiously how the preparation might be turned to commercial account. ‘It’s a good thing,’ said Gibberne, ‘a tremendous thing. I know I’m giving the world something, and I think it only reasonable we should expect the world to pay. The dignity of science is all very well, but I think somehow I must have the monopoly of the stuff for, say, ten years. I don’t see why _all_ the fun in life should go to the dealers in ham.’

My own interest in the coming drug certainly did not wane in the time. I have always had a queer little twist towards metaphysics in my mind. I have always been given to paradoxes about space and time, and it seemed to me that Gibberne was really preparing no less than the absolute acceleration of life. Suppose a man repeatedly dosed with such a preparation: he would live an active and record life indeed, but he would be an adult at eleven, middle-aged at twenty-five, and by thirty well on the road to senile decay. It seemed to me that so far Gibberne was only going to do for any one who took his drug exactly what Nature has done for the Jews and Orientals, who are men in their teens and aged by fifty, and quicker in thought and act than we are all the time. The marvel of drugs has always been great to my mind; you can madden a man, calm a man, make him incredibly strong and alert or a helpless log, quicken this passion and allay that, all by means of drugs, and here was a new miracle to be added to this strange armoury of phials

the doctors use! But Gibberne was far too eager upon his technical points to enter very keenly into my aspect of the question.

It was the 7th or 8th of August when he told me the distillation that would decide his failure or success for a time was going forward as we talked, and it was on the 10th that he told me the thing was done and the New Accelerator a tangible reality in the world. I met him as I was going up the Sandgate Hill towards Folkestone--I think I was going to get my hair cut, and he came hurrying down to meet me--I suppose he was coming to my house to tell me at once of his success. I remember that his eyes were unusually bright and his face flushed, and I noted even then the swift alacrity of his step.

‘It’s done,’ he cried, and gripped my hand, speaking very fast; ‘it’s more than done. Come up to my house and see.’

‘Really?’

‘Really!’ he shouted. ‘Incredibly! Come up and see.’

‘And it does--twice?’

‘It does more, much more. It scares me. Come up and see the stuff. Taste it! Try it! It’s the most amazing stuff on earth.’ He gripped my arm and, walking at such a pace that he forced me into a trot, went shouting with me up the hill. A whole _char-à-banc_-full of people turned and stared at us in unison after the manner of people in _chars-à-banc_. It was one of those hot, clear days that Folkestone sees so much of, every colour incredibly bright and every outline hard. There was a breeze, of course, but not so much breeze as sufficed under these conditions to keep me cool and dry. I panted for mercy.

‘I’m not walking fast, am I?’ cried Gibberne, and slackened his pace to a quick march.

‘You’ve been taking some of this stuff,’ I puffed.

‘No,’ he said. ‘At the utmost a drop of water that stood in a beaker from which I had washed out the last traces of the stuff. I took some last night, you know. But that is ancient history now.’

‘And it goes twice?’ I said, nearing his doorway in a grateful perspiration.

‘It goes a thousand times, many thousand times!’ cried Gibberne, with a dramatic gesture, flinging open his Early English carved oak gate.

‘Phew!’ said I, and followed him to the door.

‘I don’t know how many times it goes,’ he said, with his latch-key in his hand.

‘And you----’

‘It throws all sorts of light on nervous physiology, it kicks the theory of vision into a perfectly new shape.... Heaven knows how many thousand times. We’ll try all that after---- The thing is to try the stuff now.’

‘Try the stuff?’ I said, as we went along the passage.

‘Rather,’ said Gibberne, turning on me in his study. ‘There it is in that little green phial there! Unless you happen to be afraid?’

I am a careful man by nature, and only theoretically adventurous. I _was_ afraid. But on the other hand, there is pride.

‘Well,’ I haggled. ‘You say you’ve tried it?’

‘I’ve tried it,’ he said, ‘and I don’t look hurt by it, do I? I don’t even look livery, and I _feel_----’

I sat down. ‘Give me the potion,’ I said. ‘If the worst comes to the worst it will save having my hair cut, and that, I think, is one of the most hateful duties of a civilised man. How do you take the mixture?’

‘With water,’ said Gibberne, whacking down a carafe.

He stood up in front of his desk and regarded me in his easy-chair; his manner was suddenly affected by a touch of the Harley Street specialist. ‘It’s rum stuff, you know,’ he said.

I made a gesture with my hand.

‘I must warn you, in the first place, as soon as you’ve got it down to shut your eyes, and open them very cautiously in a minute or so’s time. One still sees. The sense of vision is a question of length of vibration, and not of multitude of impacts; but there’s a kind of shock to the retina, a nasty giddy confusion just at the time if the eyes are open. Keep ’em shut.’

‘Shut,’ I said. ‘Good!’

‘And the next thing is, keep still. Don’t begin to whack about. You may fetch something a nasty rap if you do. Remember you will be going several thousand times faster than you ever did before, heart, lungs, muscles, brain--everything--and you will hit hard without knowing it. You won’t know it, you know. You’ll feel just as you do now. Only everything in the world will seem to be going ever so many thousand times slower than it ever went before. That’s what makes it so deuced queer.’

‘Lor,’ I said. ‘And you mean----’

‘You’ll see,’ said he, and took up a little measure. He glanced at the material on his desk. ‘Glasses,’ he said, ‘water. All here. Mustn’t take too much for the first attempt.

The little phial glucked out its precious contents. ‘Don’t forget what I told you,’ he said, turning the contents of the measure into a glass in the manner of an Italian waiter measuring whisky. ‘Sit with the eyes tightly shut and in absolute stillness for two minutes,’ he said. ‘Then you will hear me speak.’

He added an inch or so of water to the little dose in each glass.

‘By-the-by,’ he said, ‘don’t put your glass down. Keep it in your hand and rest your hand on your knee. Yes--so. And now----’

He raised his glass.

‘The New Accelerator,’ I said.

‘The New Accelerator,’ he answered, and we touched glasses and drank, and instantly I closed my eyes.

You know that blank non-existence into which one drops when one has taken ‘gas.’ For an indefinite interval it was like that. Then I heard Gibberne telling me to wake up, and I stirred and opened my eyes. There he stood as he had been standing, glass still in hand. It was empty, that was all the difference.

‘Well?’ said I.

‘Nothing out of the way?’

‘Nothing. A slight feeling of exhilaration, perhaps. Nothing more.’

‘Sounds?’

‘Things are still,’ I said. ‘By Jove! yes! They _are_ still. Except the sort of faint pat, patter, like rain falling on different things. What is it?’

‘Analysed sounds,’ I think he said, but I am not sure. He glanced at the window. ‘Have you ever seen a curtain before a window fixed in that way before?’

I followed his eyes, and there was the end of the curtain, frozen, as it were, corner high, in the act of flapping briskly in the breeze.

‘No,’ said I; ‘that’s odd.’

‘And here,’ he said, and opened the hand that held the glass. Naturally I winced, expecting the glass to smash. But so far from smashing, it did not even seem to stir; it hung in mid-air--motionless. ‘Roughly speaking,’ said Gibberne, ‘an object in these latitudes falls 16 feet in the first second. This glass is falling 16 feet in a second now. Only, you see, it hasn’t been falling yet for the hundredth part of a second. That gives you some idea of the pace of my Accelerator.’

And he waved his hand round and round, over and under the slowly sinking glass. Finally he took it by the bottom, pulled it down and placed it very carefully on the table. ‘Eh?’ he said to me, and laughed.

‘That seems all right,’ I said, and began very gingerly to raise myself from my chair. I felt perfectly well, very light and comfortable, and quite confident in my mind. I was going fast all over. My heart, for example, was beating a thousand times a second, but that caused me no discomfort at all. I looked out of the window. An immovable cyclist, head down and with a frozen puff of dust behind his driving-wheel, scorched to overtake a galloping _char-à-banc_ that did not stir. I gaped in amazement at this incredible spectacle. ‘Gibberne,’ I cried, ‘how long will this confounded stuff last?’

‘Heaven knows!’ he answered. ‘Last time I took it I went to bed and slept it off. I tell you, I was frightened. It must have lasted some minutes, I think--it seemed like hours. But after a bit it slows down rather suddenly, I believe.’

I was proud to observe that I did not feel frightened--I suppose because there were two of us. ‘Why shouldn’t we go out?’ I asked.

‘Why not?’

‘They’ll see us.’

‘Not they. Goodness, no! Why, we shall be going a thousand times faster than the quickest conjuring trick that was ever done. Come along! Which way shall we go? Window, or door?’

And out by the window we went.

Assuredly of all the strange experiences that I have ever had, or imagined, or read of other people having or imagining, that little raid I made with Gibberne on the Folkestone Leas, under the influence of the New Accelerator, was the strangest and maddest of all. We went out by his gate into the road, and there we made a minute examination of the statuesque passing traffic. The tops of the wheels and some of the legs of the horses of this _char-à-banc_, the end of the whip-lash and the lower jaw of the conductor--who was just beginning to yawn--were perceptibly in motion, but all the rest of the lumbering conveyance seemed still. And quite noiseless except for a faint rattling that came from one man’s throat. And as parts of this frozen edifice there were a driver, you know, and a conductor, and eleven people! The effect as we walked about the thing began by being madly queer and ended by being--disagreeable. There they were, people like ourselves and yet not like ourselves, frozen in careless attitudes, caught in mid-gesture. A girl and a man smiled at one another, a leering smile that threatened to last for evermore; a woman in a floppy capelline rested her arm on the rail and stared at Gibberne’s house with the unwinking stare of eternity; a man stroked his moustache like a figure of wax, and another stretched a tiresome stiff hand with extended fingers towards his loosened hat. We stared at them, we laughed at them, we made faces at them, and then a sort of disgust of them came upon us, and we turned away and walked round in front of the cyclist towards the Leas.

‘Goodness!’ cried Gibberne, suddenly; ‘look there!’

He pointed, and there at the tip of his finger and sliding down the air with wings flapping slowly and at the speed of an exceptionally languid snail--was a bee.

And so we came out upon the Leas. There the thing seemed madder than ever. The band was playing in the upper stand, though all the sound it made for us was a low-pitched, wheezy rattle, a sort of prolonged last sigh that passed at times into a sound like the slow, muffled ticking of some monstrous clock. Frozen people stood erect, strange, silent, self-conscious-looking dummies hung unstably in mid-stride, promenading upon the grass. I passed close to a little poodle dog suspended in the

act of leaping, and watched the slow movement of his legs as he sank to earth. ‘Lord, look _here_!’ cried Gibberne, and we halted for a moment before a magnificent person in white faint-striped flannels, white shoes, and a Panama hat, who turned back to wink at two gaily dressed ladies he had passed. A wink, studied with such leisurely deliberation as we could afford, is an unattractive thing. It loses any quality of alert gaiety, and one remarks that the winking eye does not completely close, that under its drooping lid appears the lower edge of an eyeball and a little line of white. ‘Heaven give me memory,’ said I, ‘and I will never wink again.’

‘Or smile,’ said Gibberne, with his eye on the lady’s answering teeth.

‘It’s infernally hot, somehow,’ said I, ‘Lets go slower.’

‘Oh, come along!’ said Gibberne.

We picked our way among the bath-chairs in the path. Many of the people sitting in the chairs seemed almost natural in their passive poses, but the contorted scarlet of the bandsmen was not a restful thing to see. A purple-faced little gentleman was frozen in the midst of a violent struggle to refold his newspaper against the wind; there were many evidences that all these people in their sluggish way were exposed to a considerable breeze, a breeze that had no existence so far as our sensations went. We came out and walked a little way from the crowd, and turned and regarded it. To see all that multitude changed to a picture, smitten rigid, as it were, into the semblance of realistic wax, was impossibly wonderful. It was absurd, of course; but it filled me with an irrational, an exultant sense of superior advantage. Consider the wonder of it! All that I had said, and thought, and done since the stuff had begun to work in my veins had happened, so far as those people, so far as the world in general went, in the twinkling of an eye. ‘The New Accelerator----’ I began, but Gibberne interrupted me.

‘There’s that infernal old woman!’ he said.

‘What old woman?’

‘Lives next door to me,’ said Gibberne. ‘Has a lapdog that yaps. Gods! The temptation is strong!’

There is something very boyish and impulsive about Gibberne at times. Before I could expostulate with him he had dashed forward, snatched the unfortunate animal out of visible existence, and was running violently with it towards the cliff of the Leas. It was most extraordinary. The little brute, you know, didn’t bark or wriggle or make the slightest

sign of vitality. It kept quite stiffly in an attitude of somnolent repose, and Gibberne held it by the neck. It was like running about with a dog of wood. ‘Gibberne,’ I cried, ‘put it down!’ Then I said something else. ‘If you run like that, Gibberne,’ I cried, ‘you’ll set your clothes on fire. Your linen trousers are going brown as it is!’

He clapped his hand on his thigh and stood hesitating on the verge. ‘Gibberne,’ I cried, coming up, ‘put it down. This heat is too much! It’s our running so! Two or three miles a second! Friction of the air!’

‘What?’ he said, glancing at the dog.

‘Friction of the air,’ I shouted. ‘Friction of the air. Going too fast. Like meteorites and things. Too hot. And, Gibberne! Gibberne! I’m all over pricking and a sort of perspiration. You can see people stirring slightly. I believe the stuff’s working off! Put that dog down.’

‘Eh?’ he said.

‘It’s working off,’ I repeated. ‘We’re too hot and the stuff’s working off! I’m wet through.’

He stared at me, then at the band, the wheezy rattle of whose performance was certainly going faster. Then with a tremendous sweep of the arm he hurled the dog away from him and it went spinning upward, still inanimate, and hung at last over the grouped parasols of a knot of chattering people. Gibberne was gripping my elbow. ‘By Jove!’ he cried, ‘I believe it is! A sort of hot pricking and--yes. That man’s moving his pocket-handkerchief! Perceptibly. We must get out of this sharp.’

But we could not get out of it sharply enough. Luckily, perhaps! For we might have run, and if we had run we should, I believe, have burst into flames! Almost certainly we should have burst into flames! You know we had neither of us thought of that.... But before we could even begin to run the action of the drug had ceased. It was the business of a minute fraction of a second. The effect of the New Accelerator passed like the drawing of a curtain, vanished in the movement of a hand. I heard Gibberne’s voice in infinite alarm. ‘Sit down,’ he said, and flop, down upon the turf at the edge of the Leas I sat--scorching as I sat. There is a patch of burnt grass there still where I sat down. The whole stagnation seemed to wake up as I did so, the disarticulated vibration of the band rushed together into a blast of music, the promenaders put their feet down and walked their ways, the papers and flags began flapping, smiles passed into words, the winker finished his wink and went on his way complacently, and all the seated people moved and spoke.

The whole world had come alive again, was going as fast as we were, or rather we were going no faster than the rest of the world. It was like slowing down as one comes into a railway station. Everything seemed to spin round for a second or two, I had the most transient feeling of nausea, and that was all. And the little dog, which had seemed to hang for a moment when the force of Gibberne's arm was expended, fell with a swift acceleration clean through a lady's parasol!

That was the saving of us. Unless it was for one corpulent old gentleman in a bath-chair, who certainly did start at the sight of us, and afterwards regarded us at intervals with a darkly suspicious eye, and, finally, I believe, said something to his nurse about us, I doubt if a solitary person remarked our sudden appearance among them. Plop! We must have appeared abruptly. We ceased to smoulder almost at once, though the turf beneath me was uncomfortably hot. The attention of every one--including even the Amusements' Association band, which on this occasion, for the only time in its history, got out of tune--was arrested by the amazing fact, and the still more amazing yapping and uproar caused by the fact, that a respectable, over-fed lapdog sleeping quietly to the east of the bandstand should suddenly fall through the parasol of a lady on the west--in a slightly singed condition due to the extreme velocity of its movements through the air. In these absurd days, too, when we are all trying to be as psychic, and silly, and superstitious as possible! People got up and trod on other people, chairs were overturned, the Leas policeman ran. How the matter settled itself I do not know--we were much too anxious to disentangle ourselves from the affair and get out of range of the eye of the old gentleman in the bath-chair to make minute inquiries. As soon as we were sufficiently cool and sufficiently recovered from our giddiness and nausea and confusion of mind to do so we stood up, and skirting the crowd, directed our steps back along the road below the Metropole towards Gibberne's house. But amidst the din I heard very distinctly the gentleman who had been sitting beside the lady of the ruptured sunshade using quite unjustifiable threats and language to one of those chair-attendants who had 'Inspector' written on their caps: 'If you didn't throw the dog,' he said, 'who _did_?'

The sudden return of movement and familiar noises, and our natural anxiety about ourselves (our clothes were still dreadfully hot, and the fronts of the thighs of Gibberne's white trousers were scorched a drabbish brown), prevented the minute observations I should have liked to make on all these things. Indeed, I really made no observations of any scientific value on that return. The bee, of course, had gone. I looked for that cyclist, but he was already out of sight as we came into the Upper Sandgate Road or hidden from us by traffic; the

_char-à-banc_, however, with its people now all alive and stirring, was clattering along at a spanking pace almost abreast of the nearer church.

We noted, however, that the window-sill on which we had stepped in getting out of the house was slightly singed, and that the impressions of our feet on the gravel on the path were unusually deep.

So it was I had my first experience of the New Accelerator. Practically we had been running about and saying and doing all sorts of things in the space of a second or so of time. We had lived half an hour while the band had played, perhaps, two bars. But the effect it had upon us was that the whole world had stopped for our convenient inspection. Considering all things, and particularly considering our rashness in venturing out of the house, the experience might certainly have been much more disagreeable than it was. It showed, no doubt, that Gibberne has still much to learn before his preparation is a manageable convenience, but its practicability it certainly demonstrated beyond all cavil.

Since that adventure he has been steadily bringing its use under control, and I have several times, and without the slightest bad result, taken measured doses under his direction; though I must confess I have not yet ventured abroad again while under its influence. I may mention, for example, that this story has been written at one sitting and without interruption, except for the nibbling of some chocolate, by its means. I began at 6.25, and my watch is now very nearly at the minute past the half-hour. The convenience of securing a long, uninterrupted spell of work in the midst of a day full of engagements cannot be exaggerated. Gibberne is now working at the quantitative handling of his preparation, with especial reference to its distinctive effects upon different types of constitution. He then hopes to find a Retarder, with which to dilute its present rather excessive potency. The Retarder will, of course, have the reverse effect to the Accelerator; used alone it should enable the patient to spread a few seconds over many hours of ordinary time, and so to maintain an apathetic inaction, a glacier-like absence of alacrity, amidst the most animated or irritating surroundings. The two things together must necessarily work an entire revolution in civilised existence. It is the beginning of our escape from that Time Garment of which Carlyle speaks. While this Accelerator will enable us to concentrate ourselves with tremendous impact upon any moment or occasion that demands our utmost sense and vigour, the Retarder will enable us to pass in passive tranquillity through infinite hardship and tedium. Perhaps I am a little optimistic about the Retarder, which has indeed still to be discovered, but about the Accelerator there is no possible sort of doubt whatever. Its appearance upon the market in

a convenient, controllable, and assimilable form is a matter of the next few months. It will be obtainable of all chemists and druggists, in small green bottles, at a high but, considering its extraordinary qualities, by no means excessive price. Gibberne’s Nervous Accelerator it will be called, and he hopes to be able to supply it in three strengths: one in 200, one in 900, and one in 2000, distinguished by yellow, pink, and white labels respectively.

No doubt its use renders a great number of very extraordinary things possible; for, of course, the most remarkable and, possibly, even criminal proceedings may be effected with impunity by thus dodging, as it were, into the interstices of time. Like all potent preparations, it will be liable to abuse. We have, however, discussed this aspect of the question very thoroughly, and we have decided that this is purely a matter of medical jurisprudence and altogether outside our province. We shall manufacture and sell the Accelerator, and as for the consequences--we shall see.

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# Time Out for Redheads

By MIRIAM ALLEN deFORD

[*Transcriber's Note: This Project Gutenberg etext was produced from Startling Stories Summer 1955. Extensive research did not uncover any evidence that the U.S. copyright on this publication was renewed.*]

His name was Mikel Skot. He was thirty-four, five-feet-ten and lean, with decent features and all his hair and quite nice brown eyes. But somehow he always seemed to give the impression of being of indeterminate age, and slightly dusty. He lived alone, he gravitated between his job and his lodgings, and since the age of fourteen he had never known a girl well enough to call her by her first name.

For twelve years, ever since 2827, he had sold tickets at one of the windows of Time Travel Tours, Unlimited. If raises hadn't been automatic, he would never have had one, though he was punctual, faithful, honest, quick and accurate. Even the other ticket-sellers still called him Citizen Skot.

He had never budged from his cozy era--even though, as an employee, he was entitled to take any tour he wished, on his semi-annual vacation, at no cost to him beyond the planetary sales tax--nor had he ever left his native city, let alone his native planet. He was too shy even to realize he was lonely.

This morning there was the usual rush. Staggered vacations meant that any time of the year was the busy season for TTT. Skillfully Mikel Skot arranged tours and calculated rates.

"Two weeks in Rome, 45 B.C.? That will be creds 850, Citizen. You get your costume and equipment in Room 104, right off the Teleport. Yes, I'm sure they'll have a Latin language-transformer you can hire." "England in 1600, one month, reservation in the name of Chas Rusl. Yes, I have it right here. That will be creds 500, please." "You mean you want a ticket for here in Los, for a week six years ago in February? Why, yes, it's a little unusual, but--oh, certainly, I understand--a second honeymoon. Congrats, Citizen--not many couples stay together that long! Just a min, while I look up the rate for two."

The queue seemed endless, and crowds of travelers who already had their tickets were pushing their way through the doors back of the ticket-office to the Teleport itself, together with the friends who were seeing them off. If Mikel had had a moment to spare, which he hadn't, he might have wondered, as so often before, at the numbers of people everybody except himself seemed to know.

The morning wore on, and he was beginning to think longingly of 13:30 o'clock, when his lunchtime relief would arrive and he could sit in a quiet corner of an Autocaf and watch the tridimens screen for the day's news while he ate his favorite vitatabs and smoked a healthcig.

Then everything happened all at once.

The girl standing at his ticket-window was a redhead. Her eyes were green, with little dancing amber lights in them, and she smiled at him as if he were the kind of man girls do smile at, and not ineffectual Mikel Skot.

"Can you tell me," she began, in a warm, slightly husky voice.

Then she screamed loudly and collapsed.

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There were shouts and jostling and milling around, and somebody leaned over the counter and abruptly thrust something into his hand. He stood there dazed, grabbing the object, whatever it was. Then he leaned over the counter. The girl was lying there, very still. On one side of her a pool of blood was slowly forming on the floor.

The guards were coming from all directions, trying to get some kind of quiet and order into the excited throng. Mikel looked down at the thing in his hand.

It was a knife, a steel knife with a wooden handle. It was obviously an antique, and of great value. And it was smeared with fresh blood.

Mikel Skot lost his head entirely. Never before had he, or anyone he had ever heard of, been involved even remotely in any kind of violence. He never even took in historical crime plays. The redheaded girl was dead, and he held in his hand the knife that had killed her. And she had been the first girl who had smiled at him for years.

He wanted out--now!

He reached behind him and grabbed a ticket at random, not even looking to see what date it was. He punched it hastily for a week. Nobody was looking at him; everybody was still yelling at everybody else, and the sweating guards were trying to line people up and blocking the doors so that they could not get away. Mikel ran to the corridor back of the counters, which the ticket-sellers used, and saw that the company door to the Teleport was open. Out there, what with parties singing "Happy Timetrav to You," or noisily greeting homecomers, and the loudspeaker directing passengers to their proper stations, and the roar of the take-offs and returnjets, nobody seemed to have noticed that anything was wrong in the ticket-office.

Mikel glanced around once to be sure that nobody was watching him, and slipped through the door. He was still holding the knife. Automatically he thrust it into his belt-pouch.

It was typical of him that after twelve years not one of the Teleport attendants knew him by sight. He thrust his ticket at the nearest one. The man glanced at it (three other travelers were trying to get his attention at the same time) and said "Platform Eight." Mikel hurried there.

Before he reached it he remembered something. He had punched the ticket for duration, but not for place. Well, that was all right. If it had no place-punch, it would mean Los itself. He was escaping into his own

city.

The attendant at Eight took his ticket, then peered at him dubiously.

"You haven't clothes for the period, Citizen. Go to Room 104 and--"

"It doesn't matter," Mikel interrupted him. He was in a fever to be gone. "I'm--it's a research project," he added in a sudden inspiration which didn't make sense even to himself, but which the attendant, used to strange statements from travelers, accepted without comment. He sealed the timeporter on to Mikel's wrist, set it for return in a week, and helped him into the telechamber.

There was a swift moment when his head felt empty and his stomach heaved: and Mikel Skot found himself sitting on an iron bench in a park.

He had a week now to think things over. He was in Los--he had to be, his ticket said so.

But when?

He looked about him. It must be the middle of the day, the same time it had been before, and the park was full of people on their lunch-hour. They were dressed weirdly--the men and half the women wore tight cylindrical garments, one on each leg. The upper part of their bodies were covered with various kinds of brightly-colored cloth, though occasionally he saw a woman who wore only a breast-holder above her bare midriff! Mikel, in his belted tunic, huddled in a corner of his bench, fearful of notice. But nobody paid any attention to him, and once a man passed who had on a tunic too--a long white one, over bare feet and under long hair and a flowing beard. Apparently in this period people dressed as they pleased--at least in Los.

The city itself, what part of it he could see from his vantage-point, was stranger than the people. There were no moving sidewalks, and no weather-canopies over the streets--though perhaps these had only been removed for the dry season. The buildings looked shrunken and tiny--hardly one seemed to be more than thirty or forty stories high. Archaic buses and motor-cars, apparently powered by some non-atomic fuel, plied the actual streets, instead of being confined to subways. The skies were almost empty of planes, and those he saw were incredibly clumsy and slow. There was obviously no freeway for helicopters.

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It was self-evident that he was in some year of the remote past, though

just which, he had no idea. He wished he had taken time to glance at the ticket before he handed it in. He wished he had studied history komikbooks, or given more than a cursory glance at the telescreen propinforms of TTT. There was something to be said, after all, for the General Educationalists, cranks as they were.

Certainly this was not his Los--his giant city stretching from Mex to Sanfran without a break. This was a little place of probably not much more than two million inhabitants. Well, here he was for a week, and he'd better find out how he was going to eat and sleep. Properly equipped time travelers had money of the right period, but the cred checks in his pouch would do him no good now. What did he have on him that could be exchanged for board and lodging?

Only one object of undoubted value. The knife.

Surreptitiously and with distaste he took it out and looked at it. The blood had dried on it and doubtless left traces on the lining of his pouch. It was probably covered with the fingerprints of the murderer as well as with his own. But it was all he had.

In the middle of the park there was a fountain, with a pool around it. Casually Mikel Skot strolled over to it and sat down on the ledge. When he was sure nobody was looking he dipped the knife in the water and scrubbed it dry on the inner hem of his tunic. There would still be traces of blood which any chemist could find, of course; but nobody here would be examining it for that. Since anyone could see that it was of immense value, he would have to account for possession of it. He could say it was an heirloom.

Putting it back in his pouch he approached a fat man on a bench nearby.

"Where is the nearest history museum, please, Citizen?" he asked politely.

The man looked up. He had been scanning a large piece of paper which Mikel, with a thrill, recognized from one of his few visits to the Museum of Antiquities. It was a thing called a newspaper, which had antedated the tridimens telescreen. He remembered that the specimens he had seen had borne dates at the top, and if he could read the archaic printing he could find out what year it was. But the man folded it up and thrust it under his arms as he answered.

"History museum?" he echoed. "Gosh, bud, I don't know. I'm a stranger here myself--just got in from Kansas yesterday. You a foreigner?" he asked with frank curiosity. "You got a funny accent. And you sure look

funny."

A foreigner--that was a good one! But Mikel had no time to waste. He murmured "Excuse," and left. The man stared after him and made a gesture which Mikel did not understand--describing a circle in the air near his forehead.

Mikel walked to the edge of the little park and looked about him. Across the street was a store with newspapers in racks in front of it. He could go over there and see the dates. But what did it really matter? With his ignorance of all but the haziest generalities of history--he thought that once, thousands of years ago, Los had belonged to the Spaniards, and after that there was some kind of war that was maybe called the American Revolution or the Civil War or the World War, he was not sure which--it wouldn't do him much good to know whether he was in, say, 1820 or 1960 or 2080. Besides, he was afraid to cross that street full of clumsy vehicles, and with neither an overpass nor an underpass. Nowhere could he see anything that resembled a museum.

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Farther down on the same side of the street on which he stood, he saw something that looked faintly promising. He walked down to it, and found a window full of odd-looking primitive objects, the nature of some of which he could not guess. But there were knives among them, and a sign said, in ancient spelling, "Jewelry Bought and Sold." On an impulse he walked in.

A man in another queer garment--some kind of cloth upper, with a white linen thing beneath it and a ribbon tied around his neck--looked up without surprise at Mikel's literally untimely garb, and said: "Yes, sir?"

Mikel drew out the knife.

"Very valuable," he said. "An heirloom. How much will you give me?"

The man shrank back, not as if he were afraid of the knife, but as if he were suddenly afraid of Mikel.

"You kidding me?" he asked. "Or is this a stick-up?"

Mikel was not sure what the words meant, so he merely shook his head.

"Then are you nuts? There's nothing valuable about that thing. It's just an ordinary kitchen knife."

"Not valuable?" Mikel's face fell. "But look--wooden handle, steel blade."

"So what? Every knife has a wooden handle and a steel blade."

"You will not give me money for it?"

"Of course not. We don't buy junk."

There was no use arguing. One age's antique is another age's junk. Mikel sighed and departed quietly. How was he to get food and shelter for a week?

He went back to the park and sat down again on a bench. He put the knife back in his pouch.

This was what came of panicking for the first time in his humdrum life. A sudden image of the redheaded girl came before his mind--her green eyes and her smile. That girl--she was so pretty--and she had smiled at him, whom girls never noticed. And then she had been killed. Now that it was too late, he wished he had stayed, whatever might have happened to him. He wanted to help, to avenge her; he wanted to be home again.

His stomach reminded him sharply that he had had no lunch. He had never heard how long a man could go without eating. Could he even live through the week?

He sat there disconsolately, his eyes fixed on the ground. On his wrist was sealed the little gadget that was his only means of ever seeing 2839 again.

Somebody came and sat down beside him. Deep in thought, he did not even glance up. A voice said, "Can you tell me what time it is? My watch is broken and there's no clock around here."

"Watch"--that meant "to be alert." "Clock"--that was an ancient time-measuring device, he thought. The only way Mikel knew to tell the time was to glance at the ceiling of any room, or if he were outdoors to tune in on his miniature tridimens gadget, attached to his belt. He dialed it now, but there was no response. Of course not--it wouldn't work across perhaps a thousand years.

"I'm sorry," he answered. "I can't."

He turned as he spoke. He jumped violently.

The speaker was a girl. She had red hair and green eyes. Otherwise there was no resemblance, though she too was pretty. But red hair and green eyes seemed to be haunting him.

"What's that thing on your left wrist, then?" asked the girl spunkily.

* * * * *

Mikel reddened. Rule Five of the booklets he handed out with the tickets to all travelers leaped into his mind: "Remember, you cannot change the course of history. To avoid confusion and difficulty, avoid revealing to any person you meet in other time-periods the true nature of your presence there."

He broke the rule, and was sorry at once.

"It's a timeporter," he said, "set for my return home."

The girl laughed.

"That's a good one. I thought I'd heard everything since I came to this crazy place. What are you, an Arab, dressed in that tablecloth?"

"I was born right here in Los," Mikel announced with dignity. "I've always lived here."

"So they grow them crazy here right from the start! Then where's your home you're 'set' to return to?"

"Here in Los."

The girl stood up hastily, a look of alarm on her face.

"Oh, please," Mikel cried, "don't go. I can explain. Perhaps you can help me."

She sat down again dubiously.

"Well, I'm a sucker for a good story," she said. "Shoot."

"I--I wouldn't shoot. I have no weapon."

That wasn't true--he did have a weapon: the knife. But he could hardly mention that. Anyway, the girl only laughed again.

"Wisecracks, yet," she said unintelligibly. "Well, what's the story?"

"I am from this place, but I am not from your time," Mikel began laboriously; he was utterly unaccustomed to social conversation with a woman. "I am from--with me it is 2839."

"What in the--look, what are you advertising? Some science fiction magazine?"

"I don't understand that word--adver--what is it? Please believe me. I shouldn't tell you, I'm breaking a rule. But it is true."

"Go on." She fixed him with a skeptical glance.

"I was--I am a ticket-seller for Time Travel Tours. This morning--I mean what was to me this morning--a customer was killed at my window."

He plunged ahead. She listened in silence, a peculiar expression in her eyes.

"So you see," he concluded, "I am here for a week. But then I go back--the timeporter will see to that. I _want_ to go--I'm sorry I ran away. But I'm sure the police will say I did it, because of the knife."

"Let's see it."

He brought it out.

"Why, that's just an ordinary kitchen carving knife," she said, just as the man in the store had done. "I suppose you _would_ call it an antique in--what was it?--2839. I still say you're haywire--or else this is some new racket I don't get."

"I don't understand."

"Okay, I guess you wouldn't--in 2839. The language would change plenty in 886 years." Once more her laugh rang out. "I'll say you keep it up fine--that funny half-foreign way you pronounce your words. But I'll play along, and pretend this is all on the up-and-up. Even so, it's haywire--crazy. Because the dumbest cop in the world wouldn't suspect you of the murder. Anybody'd know the murderer just got rid of the knife the quickest way he could. Gosh, you were behind your window, weren't you, and she was in front of it? Where was her stab wound?"

"Wait--it's hard for me to understand. 'Cop'--is that slang for police? And the blood"--he shuddered--"came from her side. Either someone in

front or someone behind her could have done it."

"But they'll find out right away, won't they, that you didn't know the girl? They'll find out who she was, and they'll grill everybody she knew, to see who had a reason for wanting her out of the way.... Listen to me! I'm as big a nut as you are. I'm talking just as if the whole thing really happened."

"It did happen," Mikel assured her earnestly. "No, I didn't know her. I don't know any girls at all. I'm--I'm not attractive to women."

"Why, you're not so bad," said the girl kindly. "I think you're kind of cute--or would be, if you weren't rigged up in those outlandish clothes," she paused, then continued, "Well, if you can prove you didn't know her, what have you got to worry about?"

"The knife. And that I lost my head and ran."

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The girl nodded. "Leave the knife here, then. Or would that change the course of history?" She smiled. "Of course, what you ought to have done was hand it right over. Then if it was such a great antique they'd not only have the guy's fingerprints but they'd also find out who knew her that worked in a museum or had a chance to steal it from one. That's elementary homicide procedure."

"You see," said Mikel, "this also you won't believe. But our police are not conditioned to take care of killings. This is the first time in my whole life that I have ever even heard of one, except by accident. The psychologists wouldn't allow anyone to grow up who had murderous tendencies that couldn't be sublimated."

"They let that one slip by them, didn't they? And do you mean that in the great scientific future they tell us about, the police won't know as much about handling a homicide case as any hick constable knows today? Who're you trying to kid?"

"We do not have crime. The police are to guard traffic and to take up for reconditioning anybody who doesn't obey the civil rules. I don't know much history, but I know there once were wars, and then there were experts in war. Now--in my time--we have no wars, so there are no experts. In the same way we have no experts in crime."

"Then what would they do to you, if they did convict you of this murder you didn't commit?"

"I don't know. There is no penalty for murder because there have been no murders for so long. This will be a world affair; the police will refer it to the Supreme Council, and they will decide what to do. I suppose they will have me euthanized as an atavistic deviant. That's why I lost my head. It was a totally new experience and I haven't been conditioned to new experiences. But even if they don't convict me, they'll punish me for running away. They'll demote me, perhaps all the way back to where I started twelve years ago."

"It doesn't sound like much of a brave new world to me," said the girl in a disparaging tone. "What's your name--or do you just have numbers?"

"My name is Mikel Skot."

"Michael Scott--well, that sounds like a regular name, anyway. Mine's Betty French, by the way."

"Many grats to you, Citizen French. You have given me good advice. I know now it is my duty to take the knife back with me, and give it to the police. I shall tell them also about looking for somebody in a museum, as you suggested. But there will be no fingerprints--I washed the knife in that fountain, when I hoped to sell it. I forgot it _must_ exist in my era, or the murder could not have occurred.

"But that is not my big problem now. I have no money of your time. How shall I live until I can go home?"

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Betty French seemed to stiffen. She looked at him disgustedly. "I get it now," she said. "I might have known. This is just a new way of panhandling. I certainly admire it--it's a work of art. Well, I got my money's worth. I'll pay for it."

She opened her handbag, drew out a dollar bill, and laid it on Mikel's knee. He gazed at it curiously, but made no attempt to pick it up.

"Is that your kind of money?" he asked. "What do I do in exchange for it?"

"Oh, let's drop it," she sighed wearily. "My lunch-hour's up, anyway. Take it--it'll buy you a hamburger and coffee, and then you can tell your tale to the next comer and maybe get enough for a bed in a flophouse. Brother, you must have told it plenty, to get it all down so pat. It's a wonder I've missed you before--or are you just starting to

work this neighborhood?"

She snapped her bag shut and stood up.

"Please--I don't understand--why are you so angry?"

At the desperation in his voice she turned and stopped.

"Look--I really have to get back to the office. This _is_ an act, isn't it? Come clean--aren't you panhandling?"

"What does 'panhandling' mean?"

"Oh, I give up! I guess you're just looney, after all. All right, Mike, let's call it a day. You keep that buck, and now you just go to the nearest police station and tell them your story. They'll take you over to the psychiatric ward of the county hospital and you can get free board and lodging there."

Mikel turned pale and shivered.

"Oh, no," he breathed. "I'm not insane. If you don't believe me, no one else will. And the hospital will euthanize me."

"Is that what they do to crazy people in--in your time?"

"Of course. And they punish the psychologist who didn't detect the tendency and have the person euthanized in childhood."

"Suppose I give you my word they won't do that to you here and now? They'll just observe you for a few days and then they'll have you committed to a state hospital."

"You are quite positive? If I can be sure of being alive a week from now, no matter where I am, when the timeporter checks I'll go back home."

"Even if you're in a padded cell?"

"It won't matter where."

"Well, then, your problem's solved, isn't it? I'll show you how to get to the station."

"I must eat first. I'm very hungry. And what were those things you said if I should get--hamburger and coffee? They are--original foods? Our

food is all synthetic."

"You don't have to keep this up with me any more. There's a quick lunch place." She pointed.

"And they won't mind in this Autocaf that I'm not dressed like the others?"

"In this burg? They wouldn't notice if you wandered around in a loincloth. Now I've _got_ to go. This is the wackiest thing that ever happened to me, whatever it really means. Well, good luck, Mike!"

"Grats to you, Citizen French, from deep in my pineal. Oh, wait just one min more please!"

"What is it now?"

"You have given me so much to tell our police. But won't they wonder _why_ this man killed the girl?"

"They can ask him when they catch them, can't they? But it's perfectly obvious. She was buying a ticket, wasn't she?"

"Yes, certainly."

"Well, that meant she was going away--leaving him, doesn't it? So he was in love with her--maybe she was his wife--and he couldn't take it. Maybe she was going to some other guy--how do I know? He found out she was deserting him, so he got hold of the knife, and followed her."

"But I don't see why." Mikel was utterly bewildered. "She was a free agent, like anybody else. He couldn't object to her leaving if she no longer loved him--he didn't _own_ her. That doesn't make sense. If I tell one of our police _that_ theory, she will surely think I'm insane."

"She?"

"All our police are women, of course. Women are naturally gifted at keeping order."

"You tell that to our cops, and they'll surely get you tucked away in a nice hospital, but fast. Well, why else _would_ he kill her?"

"I don't know. That's why I asked you--you know so much more about such things, in your barb--in your time."

"Your policewoman will have to figure it out for herself. So long, Mike." She shook her head, smiling. "Will I have a tale to tell the crowd--if they don't decide I've gone nuts myself! Good-by!"

"Goobie, Citizen, and grats again."

Still smiling, she hurried down the path out of the park.

* * * * *

When he could see her no longer, Mikel stood up and began hesitantly to walk toward the restaurant she had pointed out. Fortunately, it was on the same side of the street, not far past the shop where he tried to sell the knife.

This was not going to be plez, not at all plez. Despite what this Beti French had told him, he was nervous about putting himself in the hands of either the police or psychologist of this barbarous era. But there didn't seem to be anything else he could do. His conversation with the redheaded girl had shown him clearly what kind of reception he would meet from anyone else he ventured to approach.

First he must eat--he was ravenous. He dared not ask for any food except the two things the girl had mentioned, whatever they were like. Presumably the money she had given him would be enough.

The restaurant had a long counter of some white substance, with stools fixed before it. Only one man sat there eating, but behind it stood another man dressed in white, with a white cap on his head. Mikel perched himself on the nearest stool.

"Hamburger, coffee, please," he said, and laid Beti's money beside him on the counter.

The other customer looked up and eyed him sharply, but the man behind the counter merely yelled "One on a bun!" through a hole in the wall. "Mustard?" he asked, "Onions? Cream?"

"No, Citizen. Hamburger, coffee," Mikel repeated, flustered.

"A joker!" the man grunted. "This town! You in the movies, bud?"

Mikel stared.

"He wants a burger without and coffee with," the other customer put in suddenly. He picked up his dishes and slid down to the next stool. He

was a heavy-set, middle-aged man, dressed as the man in the store had been--in dark cloth bifurcated leg-coverings and a dark, long-sleeved upper garment over a light-colored under-garment, with a gaudy ribbon around his neck.

"Okay, okay," said the man in white placatingly, and set down before Mikel something on a plate and something else in a cup, both hot. Mikel began sampling them gingerly with the unaccustomed implements. The restaurant man took the money, put it in a box that rang a bell, and laid down some small metal objects in its place. Then he disappeared through a door behind the counter.

Mikel's neighbor waited until he had gone. Then in a low voice he said:

"Finish the food, Citizen Skot. Then we'll talk."

Mikel looked up, frozen. The stranger shot his left wrist out from the sleeve. Sealed to it was a timeporter.

"From TTT executive, Citizen," he said briskly. "I didn't think I'd find you quite so soon, but I knew it wouldn't be long, since you didn't wait to get proper equipment for your journey. It is fort for you that this is perhaps the only place in this era where you would not have been taken up at sight for wandering around in unusual clothing."

"How--how did you know what period--"

"We only had to check the tickets, to see which was missing. Have you the knife?"

* * * * *

Mikel brought it out dumbly and laid it on the counter. The man put it in a pouch sewed into his lower garment.

"I didn't do it! I didn't!" Mikel cried despairingly. He had lost his appetite completely.

"Sh! We don't want a fuss here. I am rechecking your timeporter, Citizen Skot. We are going back immediately."

"I--I didn't even know the girl!" Mikel pleaded, remembering Beti French's instructions.

"We shall see as to that, when we get home," said the TTT executive grimly.

Then suddenly he burst out laughing. He laughed until he had to take a small piece of white material from his upper garment and wipe his eyes.

"I meant to give you a good scare, to put some sense into you," he gasped finally. "But I can't keep it up. Citizen Skot, you are a fool."

"I know that, Citizen," said Mikel humbly.

"The psychologists really conditioned you a bit too well. I am told that you live for your work and have no recreation at all. You are as ignorant of the world as a small child. Come, did you ever hear of a murder in our time, anywhere, in all your life?"

"No. But I know such things occur."

"In the past, not in our time. How could there be a murder in our era? In the old times, people killed one another for jealousy, for revenge, for greed. Such incentives do not exist in the 29th century. The only other possibility would be insanity, and the psychologists would never allow that to proceed to such a point--the diseased person would be euthanized at the very first symptoms."

"But the girl _was_ killed, right before my eyes."

"My poor man, you were a victim of your own ridiculously retired existence. Anyone else would have guessed at once. It was planned that way so as to get a good effect of a crowd in confusion--most of them were extras. Of course all the arrangements had been made with us beforehand, and the concealed telcams were focused away from any Time Travel signs."

"Telecams?"

"World Theater was making a historical crime tridimens in modern dress, Citizen Skot. The girl was an actress. The blood was faked. They thought it would be more effective not to put an actor behind the ticket-window, but to use a real ticket-seller without warning him, just as part of the crowd wasn't warned. It worked beautifully--they tell me your fright and horror showed up wonderfully well.

"They picked your window because they said they liked your looks--I can't imagine why. That was their big mistake. Any other of our ticket-sellers would have waited to see what happened next. You, you dumble, fell into a panic and ran away. And I've had to leave my desk in the middle of a busy aftern to go and fetch you. We couldn't let

you wander around here for a week without means of subsistence, and thinking you were suspected of murder!"

"I suppose I'll be demoted now," Mikel said gloomily.

"That wouldn't be fair. This wasn't one of the known responsibilities of your position. No, but I imagine you'll come in for a lot of whiffing, to use a slang expression."

"Kidding--that's what they call it here, I think. Well, I'm used to that."

"And Dafne Dart says she's wild to meet you."

"Dafne Dart? Who's she?" Mikel looked alarmed again.

"Your performance made a tremend impression on her. She told me to tell you she thinks 'you're purely vlumpish.' She's the actress who played the murder victim."

"That red-haired girl with the green eyes with flecks of amber in them?" asked Mikel eagerly. "With the streely smile and the gorge voice?"

"You seem to have noticed her," said the TTT executive dryly. "Yes, that's the one. I thought you didn't go for women."

"But that's different!" Mikel Skot caroled. "Redheads with green eyes--that's the one kind that crashes me and that I crash--I just found it out today.

"Come on, Citizen, what are we waiting for? Let's Go!"

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# THE ADVENTURES OF SIR GARETH

Retold by Beatrice Clay
from Project Gutenberg's
*The Junior Classics, V4,*
by Willam Patten (Editor)

Gareth was the youngest of the sons of Lot and Bellicent, and had grown up long after Gawain and Mordred left their home for King Arthur's court; so that when he came before the king, all humbly attired, he was not known even by his own brothers.

King Arthur was keeping Pentecost at Kink Kenadon on the Welsh border, and, as his custom was, waited to begin the feast until some adventure should befall. Presently there was seen approaching a youth who, to the wonderment of all that saw, leaned upon the shoulders of two men, his companions; and yet as he passed up the hall, he seemed a goodly youth, tall and broad-shouldered. When he stood before the king, suddenly he drew himself up and after due greeting, said: "Sir king, I would ask of you three boons; one to be granted now and two hereafter when I shall require them." And Arthur, looking upon him, was pleased, for his countenance was open and honest. So he made answer: "Fair son, ask of me aught that is honorable and I will grant it." Then the youth said: "For this present, I ask only that ye will give me meat and drink for a year and a day." "Ye might have asked and had a better gift," replied the king; "tell me now your name." "At this time, I may not tell it," said the youth. Now King Arthur trusted every man until he proved himself unworthy, and in this youth he thought he saw one who should do nobly and win renown; so laughing, he bade him keep his own counsel since so he would, and gave him in charge to Sir Kay, the seneschal.

Now Sir Kay was but harsh to those whom he liked not, and from the first he scorned the young man. "For none," said he, "but a low-born lout would crave meat and drink when he might have asked for a horse and arms." But Sir Launcelot and Sir Gawain took the youth's part. Neither knew him for Gareth of the Orkneys, but both believed him to be a youth of good promise who, for his own reasons, would pass in disguise for a season.

So Gareth lived the year among the kitchen boys, all the time mocked and scorned by Sir Kay, who called him Fairhands because his hands were white and shapely. But Launcelot and Gawain showed him all courtesy, and failed not to observe how, in all trials of strength, he excelled his comrades, and that he was ever present to witness the feats of the knights in the tournaments.

So the year passed, and again King Arthur was keeping the feast of Pentecost with his knights, when a damsel entered the hall and asked his aid: "For," said she, "my sister is closely besieged in her castle by a strong knight who lays waste all her lands. And since I know that the knights of your court be the most renowned in the world, I have come to crave help of your mightiest." "What is your sister's name, and who is he that oppresses her?" asked the king. "The Red Knight, he is called," replied the damsel. "As for my sister, I will not say her name, only that she is a high-born lady and owns broad lands." Then the king frowned and said: "Ye would have aid but will say no name. I

may not ask knight of mine to go on such an errand."

Then forth stepped Gareth from among the serving-men at the hall end and said: "Sir king, I have eaten of your meat in your kitchen this twelvemonth since, and now I crave my other two boons." "Ask and have," replied the king. "Grant me then the adventure of this damsel, and bid Sir Launcelot ride after me to knight me at my desire, for of him alone would I be made knight." "It shall be so," answered the king. "What!" cried the damsel, "I ask for a knight and ye give me a kitchen-boy. Shame on you, sir king." And in great wrath she fled from the hall, mounted her palfrey and rode away. Gareth but waited to array himself in the armor which he had kept ever in readiness for the time when he should need it, and mounting his horse, rode after the damsel.

But when Sir Kay knew what had happened, he was wroth, and got to horse to ride after Gareth and bring him back. Even as Gareth overtook the damsel, so did Kay come up with him and cried: "Turn back, Fairhands! What, sir, do ye not know me?" "Yes," answered Gareth, "I know you for the most discourteous knight in Arthur's court." Then Sir Kay rode upon him with his lance, but Gareth turned it aside with his sword and pierced Sir Kay through the side so that he fell to the ground and lay there without motion. So Gareth took Sir Kay's shield and spear and was about to ride away, when seeing Sir Launcelot draw near he called upon him to joust. At the first encounter, Sir Launcelot unhorsed Gareth, but quickly helped him to his feet. Then, at Gareth's desire, they fought together with swords, and Gareth did knightly till, at length, Sir Launcelot said, laughing: "Why should we fight any longer? Of a truth ye are a stout knight." "If that is indeed your thought, I pray you make me knight," cried Gareth. So Sir Launcelot knighted Gareth, who, bidding him farewell, hastened after the damsel, for she had ridden on again while the two knights talked. When she saw him coming, she cried: "Keep off! ye smell of the kitchen!" "Damsel," said Sir Gareth, "I must follow until I have fulfilled the adventure." "Till ye accomplish the adventure, Turn-spit? Your part in it shall soon be ended." "I can only do my best," answered Sir Gareth.

Now as they rode through the forest, they met with a knight sore beset by six thieves, and him Sir Gareth rescued. The knight then bade Gareth and the damsel rest at his castle, and entertained them right gladly until the morn, when the two rode forth again. Presently, they drew near to a deep river where two knights kept the ford. "How now, kitchen knave? Will ye fight or escape while ye may?" cried the damsel. "I would fight though there were six instead of two," replied Sir Gareth. Therewith he encountered the one knight in midstream and

struck him such a blow on the head that he fell, stunned, into the water and was drowned. Then, gaining the land, Gareth cleft in two helmet and head of the other knight, and turned to the damsel, saying, "Lead on; I follow."

But the damsel mocked him, saying: "What a mischance is this that a kitchen boy should slay two noble knights! Be not overproud, Turn-spit. It was but luck, if indeed ye did not attack one knight from behind." "Say what you will, I follow," said Sir Gareth.

So they rode on again, the damsel in front and Sir Gareth behind, till they reached a wide meadow where stood many fair pavilions; and one, the largest, was all of blue, and the men who stood about it were clothed in blue, and bore shields and spears of that color; and of blue, too, were the trappings of the horses. Then said the damsel, "Yonder is the Blue Knight, the goodliest that ever ye have looked upon, and five hundred knights own him lord." "I will encounter him," said Sir Gareth; "for if he be good knight and true as ye say, he will scarce set on me with all his following; and man to man, I fear him not." "Fie!" said the damsel, "for a dirty knave, ye brag loud. And even if ye overcome him, his might is as nothing to that of the Red Knight who besieges my lady sister. So get ye gone while ye may." "Damsel," said Sir Gareth, "ye are but ungentle so to rebuke me; for, knight or knave, I have done you good service, nor will I leave this guest while life is mine." Then the damsel ashamed, and, looking curiously at Gareth, she said, "I would gladly know what manner of man ye are. For I heard you call yourself kitchen knave before Arthur's self, but ye have ever answered patiently though I have chidden you shamefully; and courtesy comes only of gentle blood." Thereat Sir Gareth but laughed, and said: "He is no knight whom a maiden can anger by harsh words."

So talking, they entered the field, and there came to Sir Gareth a messenger from the Blue Knight to ask him if he came in peace or in war. "As your lord pleases," said Sir Gareth. So when the messenger had brought back this word, the Blue Knight mounted his horse, took his spear in his hand, and rode upon Sir Gareth. At their first encounter their lances shivered to pieces, and such was the shock that their horses fell dead. So they rushed on each other with swords and shield, cutting and slashing till the armor was hacked from their bodies; but at last, Sir Gareth smote the Blue Knight to the earth. Then the Blue Knight yielded, and at the damsel's entreaty, Sir Gareth spared his life.

So they were reconciled, and, at the request of the Blue Knight, Sir Gareth and the damsel abode that night in his tents. As they sat at

table, the Blue Knight said: "Fair damsel, are ye not called Linet?" "Yes," answered she, "and I am taking this noble knight to the relief of my sister, the Lady Liones." "God speed you, sir," said the Blue Knight, "for he is a stout knight whom ye must meet. Long ago might he have taken the lady, but that he hoped that Sir Launcelot or some other of Arthur's most famous knights, coming to her rescue, might fall beneath his lance. If ye overthrow him, then are ye the peer of Sir Launcelot and Sir Tristram." "Sir knight," answered Gareth, "I can but strive to bear me worthily as one whom the great Sir Launcelot made knight."

So in the morning they bade farewell to the Blue Knight, who vowed to carry to King Arthur word of all that Gareth had achieved; and they rode on till, in the evening, they came to a little ruined hermitage where there awaited them a dwarf, sent by the Lady Liones, with all manner of meats and other store. In the morning, the dwarf set out again to bear word to his lady that her rescuer was come. As he drew near the castle, the Red Knight stopped him, demanding whence he came. "Sir," said the dwarf, "I have been with my lady's sister, who brings with her a knight to the rescue of my lady." "It is lost labor," said the Red Knight; "even though she brought Launcelot or Tristram, I hold myself a match for them." "He is none of these," said the dwarf, "but he has overthrown the knights who kept the ford, and the Blue Knight yielded to him." "Let him come," said the Red Knight; "I shall soon make an end of him, and a shameful death shall he have at my hands, as many a better knight has had." So saying, he let the dwarf go.

Presently, there came riding toward the castle Sir Gareth and the damsel Linet, and Gareth marvelled to see hang from the trees some forty knights in goodly armor, their shields reversed beside them. And when he inquired of the damsel, she told him how these were the bodies of brave knights who, coming to the rescue of the Lady Liones, had been overthrown and shamefully done to death by the Red Knight. Then was Gareth shamed and angry, and he vowed to make an end of these evil practices. So at last they drew near to the castle walls, and saw how the plain around was covered with the Red Knight's tents, and the noise was that of a great army. Hard by was a tall sycamore tree, and from it hung a mighty horn, made of an elephant's tusk. Spurring his horse, Gareth rode to it, and blew such a blast that those on the castle walls heard it; the knights came forth from their tents to see who blew so bold a blast, and from a window of the castle the Lady Liones looked forth and waved her hand to her champion. Then, as Sir Gareth made his reverence to the lady, the Red Knight called roughly to him to leave his courtesy and look to himself: "For," said he, "she is mine, and to have her, I have fought many a battle." "It is but vain labor," said Sir Gareth, "since she loves you not. Know, too, sir

knight, that I have vowed to rescue her from you." "So did many another who now hangs on a tree," replied the Red Knight, "and soon ye shall hang beside them," Then both laid their spears in rest, and spurred their horses. At the first encounter, each smote the other full in the shield, and the girths of the saddles bursting, they were borne to the earth, where they lay for a while as if dead. But presently they rose, and setting their shields before them, rushed upon each other with their swords, cutting and hacking till the armor lay on the ground in fragments. So they fought till noon and then rested; but soon they renewed the battle, and so furiously they fought, that often they fell to the ground together. Then, when the bells sounded for evensong, the knights rested again, unlacing their helms to breathe the evening air. But looking up to the castle windows, Gareth saw the Lady Liones gazing earnestly upon him; then he caught up his helmet, and calling to the Red Knight, bade him make ready for the battle; "And this time," said he, "we will make an end of it." "So be it," said the Red Knight. Then the Red Knight smote Gareth on the hand so that his sword flew from his grasp, and with another blow he brought him grovelling to the earth. At the sight of this, Linet cried aloud, and hearing her, Gareth, with a mighty effort, threw off the Red Knight, leaped to his sword, and got it again within his hand. Then he pressed the Red Knight harder than ever, and at the last bore him to the earth, and unlacing his helm, made ready to slay him; but the Red Knight cried aloud: "Mercy! I yield." At first, remembering the evil deaths of the forty good knights, Gareth was unwilling to spare him; but the Red Knight besought him to have mercy, telling him how, against his will, he had been bound by a vow to make war on Arthur's knights. So Sir Gareth relented, and bade him set forth at once for Kink Kenadon and entreat the king's pardon for his evil past. And this the Red Knight promised to do.

Then amid much rejoicing, Sir Gareth was borne into the castle. There his wounds were dressed by the Lady Liones, and there he rested until he recovered his strength. And having won her love, when Gareth returned to Arthur's court the Lady Liones rode with him, and they two were wed with great pomp in the presence of the whole fellowship of the Round Table; the king rejoicing much that his nephew had done so valiantly. So Sir Gareth lived happily with Dame Liones, winning fame and the love of all true knights. As for Linet, she came again to Arthur's court and wedded Sir Gareth's younger brother, Sir Gaheris.

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# Napoleon Shave-Tail

by Owen Wister
Project Gutenberg's
*The Jimmyjohn Boss and Other Stories*

Augustus Albumblatt, young and new and sleek with the latest book-knowledge of war, reported to his first troop commander at Fort Brown. The ladies had watched for him, because he would increase the number of men, the officers because he would lessen the number of duties; and he joined at a crisis favorable to becoming speedily known by them all. Upon that same day had household servants become an extinct race. The last one, the commanding officer's cook, had told the commanding officer's wife that she was used to living where she could see the cars. She added that there was no society here “fit for man or baste at all.” This opinion was formed on the preceding afternoon when Casey, a sergeant of roguish attractions in G troop, had told her that he was not a marrying man. Three hours later she wedded a gambler, and this morning at six they had taken the stage for Green River, two hundred miles south, the nearest point where the bride could see the cars.

“Frank,” said the commanding officer's wife, “send over to H troop for York.”

“Catherine,” he answered, “my dear, our statesmen at Washington say it's wicked to hire the free American soldier to cook for you. It's too menial for his manhood.”

“Frank, stuff!”

“Hush, my love. Therefore York must be spared the insult of twenty more dollars a month, our statesmen must be re-elected, and you and I, Catherine, being cookless, must join the general mess.”

Thus did all separate housekeeping end, and the garrison began unitedly to eat three times a day what a Chinaman set before them, when the long-expected Albumblatt stepped into their midst, just in time for supper.

This youth was spic-and-span from the Military Academy, with a top-dressing of three months' thoughtful travel in Germany. “I was deeply impressed with the modernity of their scientific attitude,” he pleasantly remarked to the commanding officer. For Captain Duane, silent usually, talked at this first meal to make the boy welcome in this forlorn two-company post.

“We're cut off from all that sort of thing here,” said he. “I've not been east of the Missouri since '69. But we've got the railroad across, and we've killed some Indians, and we've had some fun, and we're glad we're alive--eh, Mrs. Starr?”

“I should think so,” said the lady.

“Especially now we've got a bachelor at the post!” said Mrs. Bainbridge. “That has been the one drawback, Mr. Albumblatt.”

“I thank you for the compliment,” said Augustus, bending solemnly from his hips; and Mrs. Starr looked at him and then at Mrs. Bainbridge.

“We're not over-gay, I fear,” the Captain continued; “but the flat's full of antelope, and there's good shooting up both canyons.”

“Have you followed the recent target experiments at Metz?” inquired the traveller. “I refer to the flattened trajectory and the obus controversy.”

“We have not heard the reports,” answered the commandant, with becoming gravity. “But we own a mountain howitzer.”

“The modernity of German ordnance--” began Augustus.

“Do you dance, Mr. Albumblatt?” asked Mrs. Starr.

“For we'll have a hop and all be your partners,” Mrs. Bainbridge exclaimed.

“I will be pleased to accommodate you, ladies.”

“It's anything for variety's sake with us, you see,” said Mrs. Starr, smoothly smiling; and once again Augustus bent blandly from his hips.

But the commanding officer wished leniency. “You see us all,” he hastened to say. “Commissioned officers and dancing-men. Pretty shabby--”

“Oh, Captain!” said a lady.

“And pretty old.”

“Captain!” said another lady.

“But alive and kicking. Captain Starr, Mr. Bainbridge, the Doctor and me. We are seven.”

Augustus looked accurately about him. “Do I understand seven, Captain?”

“We are seven,” the senior officer repeated.

Again Mr. Albumblatt counted heads. “I imagine you include the ladies, Captain? Ha! ha!”

“Seven commissioned males, sir. Our Major is on sick-leave, and two of our Lieutenants are related to the President's wife. She can't bear them to be exposed. None of us in the church-yard lie--but we are seven.”

“Ha! ha, Captain! That's an elegant double entendre on Wordsworth's poem and the War Department. Only, if I may correct your addition--ha! ha!--our total, including myself, is eight.” And Augustus grew as hilarious as a wooden nutmeg.

The commanding officer rolled an intimate eye at his wife.

The lady was sitting big with rage, but her words were cordial still: “Indeed, Mr. Albumblatt, the way officers who have influence in Washington shirk duty here and get details East is something I can't laugh about. At one time the Captain was his own adjutant and quartermaster. There are more officers at this table to-night than I've seen in three years. So we are doubly glad to welcome you at Fort Brown.”

“I am fortunate to be on duty where my services are so required, though I could object to calling it Fort Brown.” And Augustus exhaled a new smile.

“Prefer Smith?” said Captain Starr.

“You misunderstand me. When we say Fort Brown. Fort Russell, Fort Et Cetera, we are inexact. They are not fortified.”

“Cantonment Et Cetera would be a trifle lengthy, wouldn't it?” put in the Doctor, his endurance on the wane.

“Perhaps; but technically descriptive of our Western posts. The Germans criticise these military laxities.”

Captain Duane now ceased talking, but urbanely listened; and from time to time his eye would scan Augustus, and then a certain sublimated

laugh, to his wife well known; would seize him for a single voiceless spasm, and pass. The experienced Albumblatt meanwhile continued, “By-the-way, Doctor, you know the Charite, of course?”

Doctor Guild had visited that great hospital, but being now a goaded man he stuck his nose in his plate, and said, unwisely: “Sharrity? What's that?” For then Augustus told him what and where it was, and that Krankenhaus is German for hospital, and that he had been deeply impressed with the modernity of the ventilation. “Thirty-five cubic metres to a bed in new wards,” he stated. “How many do you allow, Doctor?”

“None,” answered the surgeon.

“Do I understand none, Doctor?”

“You do, sir. My patients breathe in cubic feet, and swallow their doses in grains, and have their inflation measured in inches.”

“Now there again!” exclaimed Augustus, cheerily. “More antiquity to be swept away! And people say we young officers have no work cut out for us!”

“Patients don't die then under the metric system?” said the Doctor.

“No wonder Europe's overcrowded,” said Starr.

But the student's mind inhabited heights above such trifling. “Death,” he said, “occurs in ratios not differentiated from our statistics.” And he told them much more while they booked at him over their plates. He managed to say 'modernity' and 'differentiate' again, for he came from our middle West, where they encounter education too suddenly, and it would take three generations of him to speak clean English. But with all his polysyllabic wallowing, he showed himself keen-minded, pat with authorities, a spruce young graduate among these dingy Rocky Mountain campaigners. They had fought and thirsted and frozen; the books that he knew were not written when they went to school; and so far as war is to be mastered on paper, his equipment was full and polished while theirs was meagre and rusty.

And yet, if you know things that other and older men do not, it is as well not to mention them too hastily. These soldiers wished that they could have been taught what he knew; but they watched young Augustus unfolding himself with a gaze that might have seemed chill to a less highly abstract thinker. He, however, rose from the table pleasantly edified by himself, and hopeful for them. And as he left them,

“Good-night, ladies and gentlemen,” he said; “we shall meet again.”

“Oh yes,” said the Doctor. “Again and again.”

“He's given me indigestion,” said Bainbridge.

“Take some metric system,” said Starr.

“And lie flat on your trajectory,” said the Doctor.

“I hate hair parted in the middle for a man,” said Mrs. Guild.

“And his superior eye-glasses,” said Mrs. Bainbridge.

“His staring conceited teeth,” hissed Mrs. Starr.

“I don't like children slopping their knowledge all over me,” said the Doctor's wife.

“He's well brushed, though,” said Mrs. Duane, seeking the bright side. “He'll wipe his feet on the mat when he comes to call.”

“I'd rather have mud on my carpet than that bandbox in any of my chairs,” said Mrs. Starr.

“He's no fool,” mused the Doctor. “But, kingdom come, what an ass!”

“Well, gentlemen,” said the commanding officer (and they perceived a flavor of the official in his tone), “Mr. Albumblatt is just twenty-one. I don't know about you; but I'll never have that excuse again.”

“Very well, Captain, we'll be good,” said Mrs. Bainbridge.

“And gr-r-ateful,” said Mrs. Starr, rolling her eyes piously. “I prophecy he'll entertain us.”

The Captain's demeanor remained slightly official; but walking home, his Catherine by his side in the dark was twice aware of that laugh of his, twinkling in the recesses of his opinions. And later, going to bed, a little joke took him so unready that it got out before he could suppress it. “My love,” said he, “my Second Lieutenant is grievously mislaid in the cavalry. Providence designed him for the artillery.”

It was wifely but not right in Catherine to repeat this strict confidence in strictest confidence to her neighbor, Mrs. Bainbridge, over the fence next morning before breakfast. At breakfast Mrs.

Bainbridge spoke of artillery reinforcing the post, and her husband giggled girlishly and looked at the puzzled Duane; and at dinner Mrs. Starr asked Albumblatt, would not artillery strengthen the garrison?

“Even a light battery,” pronounced Augustus, promptly, “would be absurd and useless.”

Whereupon the mess rattled knives, sneezed, and became variously disturbed. So they called him Albumbattery, and then Blattery, which is more condensed; and Captain Duane's official tone availed him nothing in this matter. But he made no more little military jokes; he disliked garrison personalities. Civilized by birth and ripe from weather-beaten years of men and observing, he looked his Second Lieutenant over, and remembered to have seen worse than this. He had no quarrel with the metric system (truly the most sensible), and thinking to leaven it with a little rule of thumb, he made Augustus his acting quartermaster. But he presently indulged his wife with the soldier-cook she wanted at home, so they no longer had to eat their meals in Albumblatt's society; and Mrs. Starr said that this showed her husband dreaded his quartermaster worse than the Secretary of War.

Alas for the Quartermaster's sergeant, Johannes Schmoll, that routined and clock-work German! He found Augustus so much more German than he had ever been himself, that he went speechless for three days. Upon his lists, his red ink, and his ciphering, Augustus swooped like a bird of prey, and all his fond red-tape devices were shredded to the winds. Augustus set going new quadratic ones of his own, with an index and cross-references. It was then that Schmoll recovered his speech and walked alone, saying, “Mein Gott!” And often thereafter, wandering among the piled stores and apparel, he would fling both arms heavenward and repeat the exclamation. He had rated himself the unique human soul at Fort Brown able to count and arrange underclothing. Augustus rejected his laborious tally, and together they vigiled after hours, verifying socks and drawers. Next, Augustus found more horseshoes than his papers called for.

“That man gif me der stomach pain efry day,” wailed Schmoll to Sergeant Casey. “I tell him, 'Lieutenant, dose horseshoes is expendable. We don't acgount for efry shoe like they was men's shoes, und oder dings dot is issued.' 'I prefer to cake them cop!' says Baby Bismarck. Und he smile mit his two beaver teeth.”

“Baby Bismarck!” cried, joyfully, the rosy-faced Casey. “Yo-hanny, take a drink.”

“Und so,” continued the outraged Schmoll, “he haf a Board of Soorvey on

dree-pound horseshoes, und I haf der stomach pain.”

“It was buckles the next month. The allowance exceeded the expenditure, Augustus's arithmetic came out wrong, and another board sat on buckles.

“Yo-hanny, you're lookin' jaded under Colonel Safetypin.” said Casey. “Have something?”

“Safetypin is my treat,” said Schmoll; “und very apt.”

But Augustus found leisure to pervade the post with his modernity. He set himself military problems, and solved them; he wrote an essay on “The Contact Squadron”; he corrected Bainbridge for saying “throw back the left flank” instead of “refuse the left flank”; he had reading-room ideas, canteen' ideas, ideas for the Indians and the Agency, and recruit-drill ideas, which he presented to Sergeant Casey. Casey gave him, in exchange, the name of Napoleon Shave-Tail, and had his whiskey again paid for by the sympathetic Schmoll.

“But bless his educated heart,” said Casey, “he don't learn me nothing that'll soil my innercence!”

Thus did the sunny-humored Sergeant take it, but not thus the mess. Had Augustus seen himself as they saw him, could he have heard Mrs. Starr--But he did not; the youth was impervious, and to remove his complacency would require (so Mrs. Starr said) an operation, probably fatal. The commanding officer held always aloof from gibing, yet often when Augustus passed him his gray eye would dwell upon the Lieutenant's back, and his voiceless laugh would possess him. That is the picture I retain of these days--the unending golden sun, the wide, gentle-colored plain, the splendid mountains, the Indians ambling through the flat, clear distance; and here, close along the parade-ground, eye-glassed Augustus, neatly hastening, with the Captain on his porch, asleep you might suppose.

One early morning the agent, with two Indian chiefs, waited on the commanding officer, and after their departure his wife found him breakfasting in solitary mirth.

“Without me,” she chided, sitting down. “And I know you've had some good news.”

“The best, my love. Providence has been tempted at last. The wholesome irony of life is about to function.”

“Frank, don't tease so! And where are you rushing now before the cakes?”

“To set our Augustus a little military problem, dearest. Plain living for to-day, and high thinking be jolly well--”

“Frank, you're going to swear, and I must know!”

But Frank had sworn and hurried out to the right to the Adjutant's office, while his Catherine flew to the left to the fence.

“Ella!” she cried. “Oh, Ella!”

Mrs. Bainbridge, instantly on the other side of the fence, brought scanty light. A telegram had come, she knew, from the Crow Agency in Montana. Her husband had admitted this three nights ago; and Captain Duane (she knew) had given him some orders about something; and could it be the Crows? “Ella, I don't know,” said Catherine. “Frank talked all about Providence in his incurable way, and it may be anything.” So the two ladies wondered together over the fence, until Mrs. Duane, seeing the Captain return, ran to him and asked, were the Crows on the war-path? Then her Frank told her yes, and that he had detailed Albumblatt to vanquish them and escort them to Carlisle School to learn German and Beethoven's sonatas.

“Stuff, stuff, stuff! Why, there he does go!” cried the unsettled Catherine. “It's something at the Agency!” But Captain Duane was gone into the house for a cigar.

Albumblatt, with Sergeant Casey and a detail of six men, was in truth hastening over that broad mile which opens between Fort Brown and the Agency. On either side of them the level plain stretched, gray with its sage, buff with intervening grass, hay-cocked with the smoky, mellow-stained, meerschaum-like canvas tepees of the Indians, quiet as a painting; far eastward lay long, low, rose-red hills, half dissolved in the trembling mystery of sun and distance; and westward, close at hand and high, shone the great pale-blue serene mountains through the vaster serenity of the air. The sounding hoofs of the troops brought the Indians out of their tepees to see. When Albumblatt reached the Agency, there waited the agent and his two chiefs, who pointed to one lodge standing apart some three hundred yards, and said, “He is there.” So then Augustus beheld his problem, the military duty fallen to him from Providence and Captain Duane.

It seems elementary for him who has written of “The Contact Squadron.” It was to arrest one Indian. This man, Ute Jack, had done a murder among the Crows, and fled south for shelter. The telegram heralded him, but with boundless miles for hiding he had stolen in under the cover of

night. No welcome met him. These Fort Brown Indians were not his friends at any time, and less so now, when he arrived wild drunk among their families. Hounded out, he sought this empty lodge, and here he was, at bay, his hand against every man's, counting his own life worthless except for destroying others before he must himself die.

“Is he armed?” Albumblatt inquired, and was told yes.

Augustus considered the peaked cone tent. The opening was on this side, but a canvas drop closed it. Not much of a problem--one man inside a sack with eight outside to catch him! But the books gave no rule for this combination, and Augustus had met with nothing of the sort in Germany. He considered at some length. Smoke began to rise through the meeting poles of the tepee, leisurely and natural, and one of the chiefs said:

“Maybe Ute Jack cooking. He hungry.”

“This is not a laughing matter,” said Augustus to the by-standers, who were swiftly gathering. “Tell him that I command him to surrender,” he added to the agent, who shouted this forthwith; and silence followed.

“Tell him I say he must come out at once,” said Augustus then; and received further silence.

“He eat now,” observed the chief. “Can't talk much.”

“Sergeant Casey,” bellowed Albumblatt, “go over there and take him out!”

“The Lootenant understands,” said Casey, slowly, “that Ute Jack has got the drop on us, and there ain't no getting any drop on him.”

“Sergeant, you will execute your orders without further comment.”

At this amazing step the silence fell cold indeed; but Augustus was in command.

“Shall I take any men along, sir?” said Casey in his soldier's machine voice.

“Er--yes. Er--no. Er--do as you please.”

The six troopers stepped forward to go, for they loved Casey; but he ordered them sharply to fall back. Then, looking in their eyes, he whispered, “Good-bye, boys, if it's to be that way,” and walked to the lodge, lifted the flap, and fell, shot instantly dead through the heart.

“Two bullets into him,” muttered a trooper, heavily breathing as the sounds rang. “He's down,” another spoke to himself with fixed eyes; and a sigh they did not know of passed among them. The two chiefs looked at Augustus and grunted short talk together; and one, with a sweeping lift of his hand out towards the tepee and the dead man by it, said, “Maybe Ute Jack only got three--four--cartridges--so!” (his fingers counted it). “After he kill three--four--men, you get him pretty good.” The Indian took the white man's death thus; but the white men could not yet be even saturnine.

“This will require reinforcement,” said Augustus to the audience. “The place must be attacked by a front and flank movement. It must be knocked down. I tell you I must have it knocked down. How are you to see where he is, I'd like to know, if it's not knocked down?” Augustus's voice was getting high.

“I want the howitzer,” he screeched generally.

A soldier saluted, and Augustus chattered at him.

“The howitzer, the mountain howitzer, I tell you. Don't you hear me? To knock the cursed thing he's in down. Go to Captain Duane and give him my compliments, and--no, I'll go myself. Where's my horse? My horse, I tell you! It's got to be knocked down.”

“If you please, Lieutenant,” said the trooper, “may we have the Red Cross ambulance?”

“Red Cross? What's that for? What's that?”

“Sergeant Casey, sir. He's a-lyin' there.”

“Ambulance? Certainly. The howitzer--perhaps they're only flesh wounds. I hope they are only flesh wounds. I must have more men--you'll come with me.”

From his porch Duane viewed both Augustus approach and the man stop at the hospital, and having expected a bungle, sat to hear; but at Albumblatt's mottled face he stood up quickly and said, “What's the matter?” And hearing, burst out: “Casey! Why, he was worth fifty of--Go on, Mr. Albumblatt. What next did you achieve, sir?” And as the tale was told he cooled, bitter, but official.

“Reinforcements is it, Mr. Albumblatt?”

“The howitzer, Captain.”

“Good. And G troop?”

“For my double flank movement I--”

“Perhaps you'd like H troop as reserve?”

“Not reserve, Captain. I should establish--”

“This is your duty, Mr. Albumblatt. Perform it as you can, with what force you need.”

“Thank you, sir. It is not exactly a battle, but with a, so-to-speak, intrenched--”

“Take your troops and go, sir, and report to me when you have arrested your man.”

Then Duane went to the hospital, and out with the ambulance, hoping that the soldier might not be dead. But the wholesome irony of life reckons beyond our calculations; and the unreproachful, sunny face of his Sergeant evoked in Duane's memory many marches through long heat and cold, back in the rough, good times.

“Hit twice, I thought they told me,” said he; and the steward surmised that one had missed.

“Perhaps,” mused Duane. “And perhaps it went as intended, too. What's all that fuss?”

He turned sharply, having lost Augustus among his sadder thoughts; and here were the operations going briskly. Powder-smoke in three directions at once! Here were pickets far out-lying, and a double line of skirmishers deployed in extended order, and a mounted reserve, and men standing to horse--a command of near a hundred, a pudding of pompous, incompetent, callow bosh, with Augustus by his howitzer, scientifically raising and lowering it to bear on the lone white tepee that shone in the plain. Four races were assembled to look on--the mess Chinaman, two black laundresses, all the whites in the place (on horse and foot, some with their hats left behind), and several hundred Indians in blankets. Duane had a thought to go away and leave this galling farce under the eye of Starr for the officers were at hand also. But his second thought bade him remain; and looking at Augustus and the howitzer, his laugh would have returned to him; but his heart was sore for Casey.

It was an hour of strategy and cannonade, a humiliating hour, which Fort

Brown tells of to this day; and the tepee lived through it all. For it stood upon fifteen slender poles, not speedily to be chopped down by shooting lead from afar. When low bullets drilled the canvas, the chief suggested to Augustus that Ute Jack had climbed up; and when the bullets flew high, then Ute Jack was doubtless in a hole. Nor did Augustus contrive to drop a shell from the howitzer upon Ute Jack and explode him--a shrewd and deadly conception; the shells went beyond, except one, that ripped through the canvas, somewhat near the ground; and Augustus, dripping, turned at length, and saying, “It won't go down,” stood vacantly wiping his white face. Then the two chiefs got his leave to stretch a rope between their horses and ride hard against the tepee. It was military neither in essence nor to see, but it prevailed. The tepee sank, a huge umbrella wreck along the earth, and there lay Ute Jack across the fire's slight hollow, his knee-cap gone with the howitzer shell. But no blood had flown from that; blood will not run, you know, when a man has been dead some time. One single other shot had struck him--one through his own heart. It had singed the flesh.

“You see, Mr. Albumblatt,” said Duane, in the whole crowd's hearing, “he killed himself directly after killing Casey. A very rare act for an Indian, as you are doubtless aware. But if your manoeuvres with his corpse have taught you anything you did not know before, we shall all be gainers.”

“Captain,” said Mrs. Starr, on a later day, “you and Ute Jack have ended our fun. Since the Court of Inquiry let Mr. Albumblatt off, he has not said Germany once--and that's three months to-morrow.”

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# The Traitor

by W. Somerset Maugham
from the Google Books etext of *Ashenden*

Having taken a room at the hotel at which
he had been instructed to stay, Ashenden
went out; it was a lovely day, early in August,
and the sun shone in an unclouded sky. He
had not been to Lucerne since he was a boy and but
vaguely remembered a covered bridge, a great stone
lion and a church in which he had sat, bored yet impressed,
while they played an organ ; and now wan
dering along a shady quay ( and the lake looked just

as tawdry and unreal as it looked on the picture-postcards ) he tried not so much to find his way about a half-forgotten scene as to reform in his mind some recollection of the shy and eager lad, so impatient for life ( which he saw not in the present of his adolescence but only in the future of his manhood) who so long ago had wandered there. But it seemed to him that the most vivid of his memories was not of himself, but of the crowd; he seemed to remember sun and heat and people; the train was crowded and so was the hotel, the lake steamers were packed and on the quays and in the streets you threaded your way among the throng of holiday makers. They were fat and old and ugly and odd, and they stank. Now, in wartime, Lucerne was as deserted as it must have been before the world at large discovered that Switzerland was the playground of Europe. Most of the hotels were closed, the streets were empty, the rowing boats for hire rocked idly at the water's edge and there was none to take them, and in the avenues by the lake the only persons to be seen were serious Swiss taking their neutrality, like a dachshund, for a walk with them. Ashenden felt exhilarated by the solitude, and sitting down on a bench that faced the water surrendered himself deliberately to the sensation. It was true that the lake was absurd, the water was too blue, the mountains too snowy, and its beauty, hitting you in the face, exasperated rather than thrilled ; but all the same there was something. pleasing in the prospect, an artless candour, like one of Mendelssohn's Songs Without Words, that made Ashenden smile with complacency. Lucerne reminded him of wax flowers under glass cases and cuckoo clocks and fancy work in Berlin wool. So long at all events as the fine weather lasted he was prepared to enjoy himself. He did not see why he should not at least try to combine pleasure to himself with profit to his country. He was travelling with a brand-new passport in his pocket, under a borrowed name, and this gave him an agreeable sense of owning a new personality. He was often slightly tired of himself and it diverted him for a while to be merely a creature of R.'s facile invention. The experience he had just enjoyed appealed to his acute sense of the absurd. R. , it is true, had not seen the fun of it : what humour R. possessed was of a sardonic turn and he had no facility for taking in good part a joke at his own expense. To do that you must

be able to look at yourself from the outside and be at the same time spectator and actor in the pleasant comedy of life. R. was a soldier and regarded introspection as unhealthy, unenglish and unpatriotic.

Ashenden got up and strolled slowly to his hotel. It was a small German hotel, of the second class , spotlessly clean, and his bedroom had a nice view ; it was furnished with brightly varnished pitch-pine, and though on a cold wet day it would have been wretched, in that warm and sunny weather it was gay and pleasing. There were tables in the hall and he sat down at one of these and ordered a bottle of beer. The landlady was curious to know why in that dead season he had come to stay and he was glad to satisfy her curiosity. He told her that he had recently recovered from an attack of typhoid and had come to Lucerne to get back his strength. He was employed in the Censorship Department and was taking the opportunity to brush up his rusty German. He asked her if she could recommend to him a German teacher. The landlady was a blond and blowsy Swiss, good-humoured and talkative, so that Ashenden felt pretty sure that she would repeat in the proper quarter the information he gave her. It was his turn now to ask a few questions . She was voluble on the subject of the war on account of which the hotel, in that month so full that rooms had to be found for visitors in neighbouring houses, was nearly empty. A few people came in from outside to eat their meals en pension, but she had only too lots of resident guests. One was an old Irish couple who lived in Vevey and passed their summers in Lucerne and the other was an Englishman and his wife. She was a German and they were obliged on that account to live in a neutral country. Ashenden took care to show little curiosity about them-he recognized in the description Grantley Trump-but of her own accord she told him. that they spent most of the day walking about the mountains. Herr Trump was a botanist and much interested in the flora of the country. His lady was a very nice woman and she felt her position keenly. Ah, well, the war could not last for ever. The landlady bustled away and Ashenden went upstairs.

Dinner was at seven, and, wishing to be in the dining room before anyone else so that he could take stock

of his fellow-guests as they entered, he went down as soon as he heard the bell. It was a very plain , stiff, whitewashed room, with chairs of the same shiny pitch pine as in his bedroom, and on the walls were oleographs of Swiss lakes. On each little table was a bunch of flowers. It was all neat and clean and presaged a bad dinner. Ashenden would have liked to make up for it by ordering a bottle of the best Rhine-wine to be found in the hotel, but did not venture to draw attention to himself by extravagance ( he saw on two or three tables half-empty bottles of table hock, which made him surmise that his fellow- guests drank thriftily, and so contented himself with ordering a pint of lager. Presently one or two persons came in, single men with some occupation in Lucerne and obviously Swiss, and sat down each at his own little table and untied the napkins that at the end of luncheon they had neatly tied up. They propped newspapers against their water-jugs and read while they somewhat noisily ate their soup. Then entered a very old tall bent man, with white hair and a drooping white moustache, accompanied by a little old white-haired lady in black.

These were certainly the Irish colonel and his wife of whom the landlady had spoken. They took their seats and the colonel poured out a thimbleful of wine for his wife and a thimbleful for himself. They waited in silence for their dinner to be served to them by the buxom, hearty maid.

At last the persons arrived for whom Ashenden had been waiting. He was doing his best to read a German book and it was only by an exercise of self-control that he allowed himself only for one instant to raise his eyes as they came in. His glance showed him a man of about forty-five with short dark hair, somewhat grizzled, of the middle height, but corpulent, with a broad red clean-shaven face. He wore a shirt open at the neck, with a wide collar, and a grey suit. He walked ahead of his wife, and of her Ashenden only caught the impression of a German woman self-effaced and dusty. Grantley Trump sat down and began in a loud voice explaining to the waitress that they had taken an immense walk. They had been up some mountain the name of which meant nothing to Ashenden but which excited in the maid expressions of astonishment and

enthusiasm. Then Trump, still in fluent German but with a marked English accent, said that they were so late they had not even gone up to wash, but had just rinsed their hands outside. He had a resonant voice and a jovial manner.

"Serve me quick, we're starving with hunger, and bring beer, bring three bottles. Lieber Gott, what a thirst I have ! "

He seemed to be a man of exuberant vitality. He brought into that dull, overclean dining-room the breath of life and everyone in it appeared on a sudden more alert. He began to talk to his wife, in English, and everything he said could be heard by all ; but presently she interrupted him with a remark made in an undertone. Trump stopped and Ashenden felt that his eyes were turned in his direction. Mrs. Trump had noticed the arrival of a stranger and had drawn her husband's attention to it. Ashenden turned the page of the book he was pretending to read, but he felt that Trump's gaze was fixed intently upon him. When he addressed his wife again it was in so low a tone that Ashenden could not even tell what language he used, but when the maid brought them their soup Trump, his voice still low, asked her a question. It was plain that he was enquiring who Ashenden was. Ashenden could catch of the maid's reply but the one word *länder*.

One or two people finished their dinner and went out picking their teeth. The old Irish colonel and his old wife rose from their table and he stood aside to let her pass. They had eaten their meal without exchanging a word. She walked slowly to the door ; but the colonel stopped to say a word to a Swiss who might have been a local attorney, and when she reached it she stood there, bowed and with a sheep-like look, patiently waiting for her husband to come and open it for her. Ashenden realized that she had never opened a door for herself. She did not know how to. In a minute the colonel with his old, old gait came to the door and opened it ; she passed out and he followed. The little incident offered a key to their whole lives, and from it Ashenden began to reconstruct their histories, circumstances and characters ; but he pulled himself up : he could not

allow himself the luxury of creation. He finished his dinner.

When he went into the hall he saw tied to the leg of a table a bull-terrier and in passing mechanically put down his hand to fondle the dog's drooping, soft ears. The landlady was standing at the foot of the stairs.
"Whose is this lovely beast?" asked Ashenden.
"He belongs to Herr Trump. Fritzi, he is called. Herr Trump says he has a longer pedigree than the King of England. "

Fritzi rubbed himself against Ashenden's leg and with his nose sought the palm of his hand. Ashenden went upstairs to fetch his hat, and when he came down saw Trump standing at the entrance of the hotel talking with the landlady. From the sudden silence and their constrained manner he guessed that Trump had been making enquiries about him. When he passed between them, into the street, out of the corner of his eye he saw Trump give him a suspicious stare. That frank, jovial red face bore then a look of shifty cunning. Ashenden strolled along till he found a tavern where he could have his coffee in the open and to compensate himself for the bottle of beer that his sense of duty had urged him to drink at dinner ordered the best brandy the house provided. He was pleased at last to have come face to face with the man of whom he had heard so much and in a day or two hoped to become acquainted with him. It is never very difficult to get to know anyone who has a dog. But he was in no hurry ; he would let things take their course : with the object he had in view he could not afford to be hasty. Ashenden reviewed the circumstances. Grantley Trump was an Englishman, born according to his passport

in Birmingham, and he was forty-two years of age. His wife, to whom he had been married for eleven years, was of German birth and parentage. That was public knowledge. Information about his antecedents was contained in a private document. He had started life, according to this, in a lawyer's office in Birmingham and then had drifted into journalism. He had been connected with an English paper in Cairo and

with another in Shanghai. There he got into trouble for attempting to get money on false pretences and was sentenced to a short term of imprisonment. All trace of him was lost for two years after his release, when he reappeared in a shipping-office in Marseilles. From there, still in the shipping business, he went to Hamburg, where he married, and to London. In London he set up for himself, in the export business, but after some time failed and was made a bankrupt. He returned to journalism. At the outbreak of war he was once more in the shipping business and in August 1914 was living quietly with his German wife at Southampton. In the beginning of the following year he told his employers that owing to the nationality of his wife his position was intolerable ; they had no fault to find with him and, recognizing that he was in an awkward fix, granted his request that he should be transferred to Genoa. Here he remained till Italy entered the war, but then gave notice and with his papers in perfect order crossed the border and took up his residence in Switzerland.

All this indicated a man of doubtful honesty and unsettled disposition, with no background and of no financial standing; but the facts were of no importance to anyone till it was discovered that Trump, certainly from the beginning of the war and perhaps sooner, was in the service of the German Intelligence Depart164 ment. He had a salary of forty pounds a month. But though dangerous and wily no steps would have been taken to deal with him if he had contented himself with transmitting such news as he was able to get in Switzerland. He could do no great harm there and it might even be possible to make use of him to convey information that it was desirable to let the enemy have. He had no notion that anything was known of him. His letters, and he received a good many, were closely censored ; there were few codes that the people who dealt with such matters could not in the end decipher and it might be that sooner or later through him it would be possible to lay hands on the organization that still flourished in England. But then he did something that drew R.'s attention to him. Had he known it none could have blamed him for shaking in his shoes : R. was not a very nice man to get on the wrong side of. Trump scraped acquaintance in Zürich with a young

Spaniard, Gomez by name, who had lately entered the British secret service, by his nationality inspired him with confidence, and managed to worm out of him the fact that he was engaged in espionage. Probably the Spaniard, with a very human desire to seem important, had done no more than talk mysteriously ; but on Trump's information he was watched when he went to Germany and one day caught just as he was posting a letter in a code that was eventually deciphered. He was tried, convicted and shot. It was bad enough to lose a useful and disinterested agent, but it entailed besides the changing of a safe and simple code. R. was not pleased. But R. was not the man to let any desire of revenge stand in the way of his main object and it occurred to him that if Trump was merely betraying his country for money it might be possible to get him to take more money to betray his employers. The fact that he had succeeded in delivering into their hands an agent of the Allies must seem to them an earnest of his good faith. He might be very useful . But R. had no notion what kind of man Trump was, he had lived his shabby, furtive life obscurely, and the only photograph that existed of him was one taken for a passport. Ashenden's instructions were to get acquainted with Trump and see whether there was any chance that he would . work honestly for the British : if he thought there was, he was entitled to sound him and if his suggestions were met with favour to make certain propositions. It was a task that needed tact and a knowledge of men. If on the other hand Ashenden came to the conclusion that Trump could not be bought he was to watch and report his movements. The information he had ob tained from Gustav was vague, but important ; there was only one point in it that was interesting, and this was that the head of the German Intelligence Department in Berne was growing restive at Trump's lack of activity. Trump was asking for a higher salary and Major von P. had told him that he must earn it . It might be that he was urging him to go to England. If he could be induced to cross the frontier Ashenden's work was done.

"How the devil do you expect me to persuade him to put his head in a noose?" asked Ashenden.

"It won't be a noose, it'll be a firing squad, " said R. "Trump's clever. "

"Well, be cleverer, damn your eyes."

Ashenden made up his mind that he would take no steps to make Trump's acquaintance, but allow the first advances to be made by him. If he was being pressed for results it must surely occur to him that it would be worth while to get into conversation with an Englishman who was employed in the Censorship Department. Ashenden was prepared with a supply of information that it could not in the least benefit the Central Powers to possess. With a false name and a false passport he had little fear that Trump would guess that he was a British agent.

Ashenden did not have to wait long. Next day he was sitting in the doorway of the hotel, drinking a cup of coffee and already half asleep after a substantial mittagessen, when the Trumps came out of the diningroom. Mrs. Trump went upstairs and Trump released his dog. The dog bounded along and in a friendly fashion leaped up against Ashenden.

"Come here, Fritzi, " cried Trump, and then to Ashenden: "I'm so sorry. But he's quite gentle."
“Oh, that's all right. He won't hurt me. "
Trump stopped at the doorway.
"He's a bull-terrier. You don't often see them on the Continent. " He seemed while he spoke to be taking Ashenden's measure ; he called to the maid. "A coffee, please, fraülein. You've just arrived, haven't you ?"
"Yes, I came yesterday."
"Really? I didn't see you in the dining-room last night. Are you making a stay?"
"I don't know. I've been ill and I've come here to recuperate. "

The maid came with the coffee and seeing Trump talking to Ashenden put the tray on the table at which he was sitting. Trump gave a laugh of faint embarrassment.
"I don't want to force myself upon you. I don't know why the maid put my coffee on your table."
"Please sit down, " said Ashenden.
"It's very good of you. I've lived so long on the Continent that I'm always forgetting that my countrymen are apt to look upon it as confounded cheek if you talk to them. Are you English, by the way, or American ?"
"English," said Ashenden.

Ashenden was by nature a very shy person, and he had in vain tried to cure himself of a failing that at his age was unseemly, but on occasion he knew how to make effective use of it. He explained now in a hesitat□ ing and awkward manner the facts that he had the day before told the landlady and that he was convinced she had already passed on to Trump.

"You couldn't have come to a better place than Lucerne. It's an oasis of peace in this war-weary world. When you're here you might almost forget that there is such a thing as a war going on. That is why I've come here. I'm a journalist by profession. "

"I couldn't help wondering if you wrote, " said Ashenden, with an eagerly timid smile.

It was clear that he had not learnt that ' oasis of peace in a war-weary world' at the shipping-office.

"You see, I married a German lady, " said Trump gravely.

"Oh, really ?"

"I don't think anyone could be more patriotic than I am, I'm English through and through and I don't mind telling you that in my opinion the British Empire is the greatest instrument for good that the world has ever seen, but having a German wife I naturally see a good deal of the reverse of the medal. You don't have to tell me that the Germans have faults, but frankly I'm not prepared to admit that they're devils incarnate. At the beginning of the war my poor wife had a very rough time in England and I for one couldn't have blamed her if she'd felt rather bitter about it. Everyone thought she was a spy. It'll make you laugh when you know her. She's the typical German hausfrau who cares for nothing but her house and her husband and our only child Fritzi. " Trump fondled his dog and gave a little laugh. "Yes, Fritzi, you are our child, aren't you? Naturally it made my position very awkward, I was connected with some very important papers, and my editors weren't quite comfortable about it. Well, to cut a long story short I thought the most dignified course was to resign and come to a neutral country till the storm blew over. My wife and I never discuss the war, though I'm bound to tell you that it's more on my account than hers, she's much more tolerant than I am and she's more willing to look upon this terrible business from my point of view than I am from hers."

"That is strange, " said Ashenden. "As a rule women are so much more rabid than men.'
"My wife is a very remarkable person. I should like to introduce you to her. By the way, I don't know if you know my name. Grantley Trump."
"My name is Somerville, " said Ashenden.
He told him then of the work he had been doing in the Censorship Department, and he fanced that into Trump's eyes came a certain intentness. Presently he told him that he was looking for someone to give him conversation-lessons in German so that he might rub up his rusty knowledge of the language ; and as he spoke a notion flashed across his mind : he gave Trump a look and saw that the same notion had come to him. It had occurred to them at the same instant that it would be a very good plan for Ashenden's teacher to be Mrs. Trump.
"I asked our landlady if she could find me someone and she said she thought she could. I must ask her again. It ought not to be very hard to find a man who is prepared to come and talk German to me for an hour a day. "
"I wouldn't take anyone on the landlady's recommendation," said Trump. "After all you want someone with a good north-German accent and she only talks Swiss. I'll ask my wife if she knows anyone. My wife's a very highly educated woman and you could trust her recommendation."
"That's very kind of you. "

Ashenden observed Grantley Trump at his ease. He noticed how the small, grey-green eyes, which last night he had not been able to see, contradicted the red good-humoured frankness of the face. They were quick and shifty, but when the mind behind them was seized by an unexpected notion they were suddenly still. It gave one a peculiar feeling of the working of the brain. They were not eyes that inspired confidence ; Trump did that with his jolly, good-natured smile, the openness of his broad, weather-beaten face, his comfortable obesity and the cheeriness of his loud, deep voice. He was doing his best now to be agreeable. While Ashenden talked to him, a little shyly still but gaining confidence from that breezy, cordial manner, capable of putting anyone at his ease, it intrigued him to remember that the man was a common spy. It gave

a tang to his conversation to reflect that he had been ready to sell his country for no more than forty pounds a month. Ashenden had known Gomez, the young Spaniard whom Trump had betrayed. He was a high spirited youth, with a love of adventure, and he had undertaken his dangerous mission not for the money he earned by it, but from a passion for romance. It amused him to outwit the clumsy German and it appealed to his sense of the absurd to play a part in a shilling shocker. It was not very nice to think of him now six feet underground in a prison yard. He was young and he had a certain grace of gesture. Ashenden wondered whether Trump had felt a qualm when he delivered him up to destruction.

"I suppose you know a little German ?" asked Trump, interested in the stranger.
"Oh, yes, I was a student in Germany, and I used to talk it fluently, but that is long ago and I have forgotten. I can still read it very comfortably."
"Oh, yes, last night. I noticed you were reading a German book."

Fool ! It was only a little while since he had told Ashenden that he had not seen him at dinner. He wondered whether Trump had observed the slip. How difficult it was never to make one ! Ashenden must be on his guard ; the thing that made him most nervous was the thought that he might not answer readily enough to his assumed name of Somerville. Of course there was always the chance that Trump had made the slip on purpose to see by Ashenden's face whether he noticed anything. Trump got up.

"There is my wife. We go for a walk up one of the mountains every afternoon. I can tell you some charming walks. The flowers even now are lovely. "
"I'm afraid I must wait till I'm a bit stronger, "
said Ashenden, with a little sigh.
He had naturally a pale face and never looked as robust as he was. Mrs. Trump came downstairs and her husband joined her. They walked down the road, Fritzi bounding round them, and Ashenden saw that Trump immediately began to speak with volubility.
He was evidently telling his wife the results of his interview with Ashenden. Ashenden looked at the sun

shining so gaily on the lake ; the shadow of a breeze fluttered the green leaves of the trees ; everything invited to a stroll : he got up, went to his room and throwing himself on his bed had a very pleasant sleep .

He went into dinner that evening as the Trumps were finishing, for he had wandered melancholy about Lucerne in the hope of finding a cocktail that would enable him to face the potato salad that he foresaw, and on their way out of the dining-room Trump stopped and asked him if he would drink coffee with them. When Ashenden joined them in the hall Trump got up and introduced him to his wife. She bowed stiffly and no answering smile came to her face to respond to Ashenden's civil greeting. It was not hard to see that her attitude was definitely hostile. It put Ashenden at his ease. She was a plainish woman, nearing fcrty, with a muddy skin and vague features ; her drab hair was arranged in a plait round her head like that of Napoleon's Queen of Prussia ; and she was squarely built, plump rather than fat, and solid. But she did not look stupid ; she looked on the contrary a woman of character and Ashenden, who had lived enough in Germany to recognize the type, was ready to believe that though capable of doing the housework, cooking the dinner and climbing a mountain, she might be also prodigiously well-informed. She wore a white blouse that showed a sunburned neck, a black skirt and heavy walking boots. Trump addressing her in English told her in his jovial way, as though she did not know it already, what Ashenden had told him about himself. She listened grimly.
"I think you told me you understood German, "
said Trump, his big red face wreathed in polite smiles but his little eyes darting about restlessly.
"Yes, I was for some time a student in Heidelberg. "
"Really?" said Mrs. Trump in English, an expression of faint interest for a moment chasing away the sullenness from her face. "I know Heidelberg very well. I was at school there for one year."
Her English was correct, but throaty, and the mouthing emphasis she gave her words was disagreeable. Ashenden was diffuse in praise of the old university town and the beauty of the neighbourhood. She heard him, from the standpoint of her Teutonic superiority, with toleration rather than with enthusiasm.

"It is well known that the valley of the Neckar is
one of the beauty places of the whole world, " she said.
"I have not told you, my dear," said Trump then,
"that Mr. Somerville is looking for someone to give
him conversation lessons while he is here. I told him
that perhaps you could suggest a teacher."
"No, I know no one whom I could conscientiously
recommend, " she answered. "The Swiss accent is hateful
beyond words. It could do Mr. Somerville only
harm to converse with a Swiss."
"If I were in your place, Mr. Somerville, I would
try and persuade my wife to give you lessons. She is,
if I may say so, a very cultivated and highly educated
woman. "
"Ach, Grantley, I have not the time. I have my
own work to do."
Ashenden saw that he was being given his opportunity.
The trap was prepared and all he had to do
was to fall in. He turned to Mrs. Trump with a manner
that he tried to make shy, deprecating and modest.
"Of course it would be too wonderful if you would
give me lessons. I should look upon it as a real privilege.
Naturally I wouldn't want to interfere with your
work, I am just here to get well, with nothing in the
world to do, and I would suit my time entirely to your
convenience. "
He felt a flash of satisfaction pass from one to the
other and in Mrs. Trump's blue eyes he fancied that he
saw a dark glow.
"Of course it would be a purely business arrangement," said
Trump. "There's no reason that my good
wife shouldn't earn a little pin-money. Would you think
ten francs an hour too much?"
"No," said Ashenden, "I should think myself lucky
to get a first-rate teacher for that. "
"What do you say, my dear ? Surely you can spare
an hour, and you would be doing this gentlemen a kindness.
He would learn that all Germans are not the
devilish fiends that they think them in England."

On Mrs. Trump's brow was an uneasy frown and
Ashenden could not but think with apprehension of
that hour's conversation a day that he was going to
exchange with her. Heaven only knew how he would
have to rack his brain for subjects of discourse with

that heavy and morose woman. Now she made a visible effort.
"I shall be very pleased to give Mr. Somerville conversation lessons."
"I congratulate you, Mr. Somerville, " said Trump noisily. "You're in for a treat. When will you start, to-morrow at eleven?"
"That would suit me very well if it suits Mrs. Trump."
"Yes, that is as good an hour as another," she answered.
Ashenden left them to discuss the happy outcome of their diplomacy. But when, punctually at eleven next morning, he heard a knock at his door ( for it had been arranged that Mrs. Trump should give him his lesson. in his room) it was not without trepidation that he opened it. It behooved him to be frank, a trifle indiscreet, but obviously wary of a German woman, sufficiently intelligent, and impulsive. Mrs. Trump's face was dark and sulky. She plainly hated having anything to do with him. But they sat down and she began, somewhat peremptorily, to ask him questions about his knowledge of German literature. She corrected his mistakes with exactness and when he put before her some difficulty in German construction explained it with clearness and precision. It was obvious that though she hated giving him a lesson she meant to give it conscientiously. She seemed to have not only an aptitude for teaching, but a love of it, and as the hour went on she began to speak with greater earnestness. It was already only by an effort that she remembered that he was a brutal Englishman. Ashenden, noticing the unconscious struggle within her, found himself not a little entertained ; and it was with truth that, when later in the day Trump asked him how the lesson had gone, he answered that it was highly satisfactory ; Mrs. Trump was an excellent teacher and a most interesting person.
"I told you so. She's the most remarkable woman I know. "
And Ashenden had a feeling that when in his hearty, laughing way Trump said this he was for the first time entirely sincere.

In a day or two Ashenden guessed that Mrs. Trump was giving him lessons only in order to enable Trump to arrive at a closer intimacy with him, for she confined herself strictly to matters of literature, music and painting ; and when Ashenden, by way of experiment, brought the conversation round to the war, she

cut him short.
"I think that is a topic that we had better avoid, Herr Somerville, " she said.
She continued to give her lessons with the greatest thoroughness, and he had his money's worth, but every day she came with the same sullen face and it was only in the interest of teaching that she lost for a moment her instinctive dislike of him. Ashenden exercised in turn, but in vain, all his wiles. He was ingratiating, ingenuous, humble, grateful, flattering, simple and timid.
She remained coldly hostile. She was a fanatic. Her patriotism was aggressive, but disinterested, and obsessed with the notion of the superiority of all things German she loathed England with a virulent hatred because in that country she saw the chief obstacle to their diffusion. Her ideal was a German world in which the rest of the nations under a hegemony greater than that of Rome should enjoy the benefits of German science and German art and German culture. There was in the conception a magnificent impudence that appealed to Ashenden's sense of humour. She was no fool. She had read much, in several languages, and she could talk of the books she had read with good sense. She had a knowledge of modern painting and modern music that not a little impressed Ashenden. It was amusing once to hear her before luncheon play one of those silvery little pieces of Debussy : she played it disdainfully because it was French and so light, but with an angry appreciation of its grace and gaiety. When Ashenden congratulated her she shrugged her shoulders.

"The decadent music of a decadent nation, " she said. Then with powerful hands she struck the first resounding chords of a sonata by Beethoven ; but she stopped. "I cannot play, I am out of practice, and you English, what do you know of music? You have not produced a composer since Purcell !"
"What do you think of that statement ?" Ashenden, smiling, asked Trump who was standing near.
"I confess its truth. The little I know of music my wife taught me. I wish you could hear her play when she is in practice. " He put his fat hand, with its square, stumpy fingers, on her shoulder. "She can wring your heartstrings with pure beauty."
"Dummer Kerl," she said, in a soft voice, " Stupid

fellow," and Ashenden saw her mouth for a moment quiver, but she quickly recovered. "You English, you cannot paint, you cannot model, you cannot write music."
"Some of us can at times write pleasing verses, " said Ashenden, with good humour, for it was not his business to be put out, and, he did not know why, two lines occurring to him he said them:
"Whither, O splendid ship, thy white sails crowding, Leaning across the bosom of the urgent West"
"Yes," said Mrs. Trump, with a strange gesture , "you can write poetry. I wonder why."
And to Ashenden's surprise she went on, in her guttural English, to recite the next two lines of the poem he had quoted.
"Come, Grantley, mittagessen is ready, let us go into the dining- room ."

They left Ashenden reflective.

Ashenden admired goodness, but was not outraged by wickedness. People sometimes thought him heartless because he was more often interested in others than attached to them, and even in the few to whom he was attached his eyes saw with equal clearness the merits and the defects. When he liked people it was not because he was blind to their faults, he did not mind their faults but accepted them with a tolerant shrug of the shoulders, or because he ascribed to them excellencies that they did not possess ; and since he judged his friends with candour they never disappointed him and so he seldom lost one. He asked from none more than he could give. He was able to pursue his study of the Trumps without prejudice and without passion. Mrs. Trump seemed to him more of a piece and therefore the easier of the two to understand ; she obviously detested him; though it was so necessary for her to be civil to him her antipathy was strong enough to wring from her now and then an expression of rudeness ; and had she been safely able to do so she would have killed him without a qualm. But in the pressure of Trump's chubby hand on his wife's shoulder and in the fugitive trembling of her lips. Ashenden had divined that this unprepossessing woman and that mean fat man were joined together by a deep and sincere love. It was touching. Ashenden assembled

the observations that he had been making for the past few days and little things that he had noticed but to which he had attached no significance returned to him. It seemed to him that Mrs. Trump loved her husband because she was of a stronger character than he and because she felt his dependence on her ; she loved him for his admiration of her, and you might guess that till she met him this dumpy, plain woman with her dullness, good sense and want of humour could not have much enjoyed the admiration of men ; she enjoyed his heartiness and his noisy jokes, and his high spirits stirred her sluggish blood ; he was a great big bouncing boy and he would never be anything else and she felt like a mother towards him ; she had made him what he was, and he was her man and she was his woman, and she loved him, notwithstanding his weakness (for with her clear head she must always have been conscious of that) , she loved him, ach, was, as Isolde loved Tristan. But then there was the espionage. Even Ashenden with all his tolerance for human frailty could not but feel that to betray your country for money is not a very pretty proceeding. Of course she knew of it, indeed it was probably through her that Trump had first been approached ; he would never have undertaken such work if she had not urged him to it. She loved him and she was an honest and an upright woman. By what devious means had she persuaded herself to force her husband to adopt so base and dishonourable a calling ? Ashenden lost himself in a labyrinth of conjecture as he tried to piece together the actions of her mind.

Grantley Trump was another story. There was little to admire in him, but at that moment Ashenden was not looking for an object of admiration ; but there was much that was singular and much that was unexpected in that gross and vulgar fellow. Ashenden watched with entertainment the suave manner in which the spy tried to inveigle him in his toils. It was a couple of days after his first lesson that Trump after dinner, his wife having gone upstairs, threw himself heavily into a chair by Ashenden's side. His faithful Fritzi came up to him and put his long muzzle with its black nose on his knee.

"He has no brain, " said Trump, "but a heart of gold. Look at those little pink eyes. Did you ever see

anything so stupid ? And what an ugly face, but what incredible charm !'

"Have you had him long?" asked Ashenden.
"I got him in 1914 just before the outbreak of war. Bythe way, what do you think of the news to-day? Of course my wife and I never discuss the war. You can't think what a relief to me it is to find a fellowcountryman to whom I can open my heart.'

He handed Ashenden a cheap Swiss cigar and Ashenden, making a rueful sacrifice to duty, accepted it.
"Of course they haven't got a chance, the Germans, " said Trump, "not a dog's chance. I knew they were beaten the moment we came in. ”
His manner was earnest, sincere and confidential. Ashenden made a commonplace rejoinder.
"It's the greatest grief of my life that owing to my wife's nationality I was unable to do any war work. I tried to enlist the day war broke out, but they wouldn't have me on account of my age, but I don't mind telling you, if the war goes on much longer, wife or no wife, I'm going to do something. With my knowledge of languages I ought to be of some service in the Censorship Department. That's where you were, wasn't it ?"
That was the mark at which he had been aiming and in answer now to his well-directed questions Ashenden gave him the information that he had already prepared. Trump drew his chair a little nearer and dropped his voice.

"I'm sure you wouldn't tell me anything that anyone shouldn't know, but after all these Swiss are absolutely pro- German and we don't want to give anyone the chance of overhearing. "
Then he went on another tack. He told Ashenden a number of things that were of a certain secrecy.
"I wouldn't tell this to anybody else, you know, but I have one or two friends who are in pretty influential positions, and they know they can trust me."

Thus encouraged Ashenden was a little more deliberately indiscreet and when they parted both had reason to be satisfied. Ashenden guessed that Trump's typewriter would be kept busy next morning and that

extremely energetic Major in Berne would shortly receive a most interesting report.
One evening, going upstairs after dinner, Ashenden passed an open bath-room. He caught sight of the Trumps.
"Come in," cried Trump in his cordial way. "We're washing our Fritzi. ”
The bull-terrier was constantly getting himself very dirty, and it was Trump's pride to see him clean and white. Ashenden went in. Mrs. Trump with her sleeves turned up and a large white apron was standing at one end of the bath, while Trump, in a pair of trousers and a singlet, his fat, freckled arms bare, was soaping the wretched hound.
"We have to do it at night, " he said, " because the Fitzgeralds use this bath and they'd have a fit if they knew we washed the dog in it. We wait till they go to bed. Come along, Fritzi, show the gentleman how beautifully you behave when you have your face scrubbed. "
The poor brute, woe-begone but faintly wagging his tail to show that however foul was this operation performed on him he bore no malice to the god who did it, was standing in the middle of the bath in six inches of water. He was soaped all over and Trump, talking the while, shampooed him with his great fat hands.
"Oh, what a beautiful dog he's going to be when he's as white as the driven snow. His master will be as proud as Punch to walk out with him and all the little lady-dogs will say : good gracious, who's that beautiful aristocratic-looking bull-terrier walking as though he owned the whole of Switzerland ? Now stand still while you have your ears washed. You couldn't bear to go out into the street with dirty ears, could you? like a nasty little Swiss schoolboy. Noblesse oblige. Now the black nose. Oh, and all the soap is going into his little pink eyes and they'll smart. '
""
Mrs. Trump listened to this nonsense with a good humoured sluggish smile on her broad, plain face, and presently gravely took a towel.
"Now he's going to have a ducking. Upsie-daisy."
Trump seized the dog by the fore legs and ducked him once and ducked him twice. There was a struggle, a flurry and a splashing. Trump lifted him out of the

bath.
"Now go to mother and she'll dry you. "
Mrs. Trump sat down and taking the dog between her strong legs rubbed him till the sweat poured off her forehead. And Fritzi, a little shaken and breathless, but happy it was all over stood, with his sweet stupid face, white and shining.
"Blood will tell," cried Trump exultantly. "He knows the names of no less than sixty-four of his ancestors, and they were all nobly born."

Ashenden was faintly troubled. He shivered a little as he walked upstairs.

Then, one Sunday, Trump told him that he and his wife were going on an excursion and would eat their luncheon at some little mountain restaurant ; and he suggested that Ashenden, each paying his share, should come with them. After three weeks at Lucerne Ashenden thought that his strength would permit him to venture the exertion. They started early, Mrs. Trump businesslike in her walking boots and Tyrolese hat and alpenstock, and Trump in stockings and plus- fours looking very British. The situation amused Ashenden and he was prepared to enjoy his day ; but he meant to keep his eyes open ; it was not inconceivable that the Trumps had discovered what he was and it would not do to go too near a precipice : Mrs. Trump would not hesitate to give him a push and Trump for all his jolliness was an ugly customer. But on the face of it there was nothing to mar Ashenden's pleasure in the golden morning. The air was fragrant. Trump was full of conversation. He told funny stories. He was gay and jovial. The sweat rolled off his great red face and he laughed at himself because he was so fat. To Ashenden's astonishment he showed a peculiar knowledge of the mountain flowers. Once he went out of the way to pick one he saw a little distance from the path and brought it back to his wife. He looked at it ten derly.

"Isn't it lovely ?" he cried, and his shifty grey-green eyes for a moment were as candid as a child's. "It's like a poem by Walter Savage Landor. "
"Botany is my husband's favourite science, " said Mrs. Trump. "I laugh at him sometimes. He is devoted to flowers.

Often when we have hardly had enough money to pay the butcher he has spent everything in his pocket to bring me a bunch of roses. "

"Qui fleurit sa maison fleurit son cœur," said Grantley Trump.

Ashenden had once or twice seen Trump, coming in from a walk, offer Mrs. Fitzgerald a nosegay of mountain flowers with an elephantine courtesy that was not entirely displeasing; and what he had just learned added a certain significance to the pretty little action. His passion for flowers was genuine and when he gave them to the old Irish lady he gave her something he valued. It showed a real kindness of heart. Ashenden had always thought botany a tedious science, but Trump, talking exuberantly as they walked along, was able to impart to it life and interest. He must have given it a good deal of study.

"I've never written a book, " he said. "There are too many books already and any desire to write I have is satisfied by the more immediately profitable and quite ephemeral composition of an article for a daily paper. But if I stay here much longer I have half a mind to write a book about the wild flowers of Switzerland. Oh, I wish you'd been here a little earlier. They were marvellous. But one wants to be a poet for that, and I'm only a poor newspaper man.

It was curious to observe how he was able to combine real emotion with false fact.

When they reached the inn, with its view of the mountains and the lake, it was good to see the sensual pleasure with which he poured down his throat a bottle of ice-cold beer. You could not but feel sympathy for a man who took so much delight in simple things. They lunched deliciously off scrambled eggs and mountain trout. Even Mrs. Trump was moved to an unwonted gentleness by her surroundings ; the inn was in an agreeably rural spot, it looked like a picture of a Swiss châlet in a book of early nineteenth century travels ; and she treated Ashenden with something less than her usual hostility. When they arrived she had burst into loud German exclamations on the beauty of the scene, and now, softened perhaps too by food and drink, her eyes, dwelling on the grandeur before her, filled with tears. She stretched out her hand.

"It is dreadful and I am ashamed, notwithstanding this horrible and unjust war I can feel in my heart at the moment nothing but happiness and gratitude. "

Trump took her hand and pressed it and, an unusual thing with him, addressing her in German, called her little pet-names. It was absurd, but touching. Ashenden, leaving them to their emotions, strolled through the garden and sat down on a bench that had been prepared for the comfort of the tourist. The view was of course spectacular, but it captured you ; it was like a piece of music that was obvious and meretricious, but for the moment shattered your self- control.

And as Ashenden lingered idly in that spot he pondered over the mystery of Grantley Trump's treachery. If he liked strange people he had found in him one who was strange beyond belief. It would be foolish to deny that he had amiable traits. His joviality was not assumed, he was without pretence a hearty fellow, and he had real good nature. He was always ready to do a kindness. Ashenden had often watched him with the old Irish Colonel and his wife who were the only other residents of the hotel ; he would listen good-humouredly to the old man's tedious stories of the Egyptian war, and he was charming with her. Now that Ashenden had arrived at terms of some familiarity with Trump he found that he regarded him less. with repulsion than with curiosity. He did not think that he had become a spy merely for the money; he was a man of modest tastes and what he had earned in a shipping-office must have sufficed to so good a manager as Mrs. Trump ; and after war was declared there was no lack of remunerative work for men over the military age. It might be that he was one of those men who prefer devious ways to straight for some intricate pleasure they get in fooling their fellows ; and that he had turned spy, not from hatred of the country that had imprisoned him, not even from love of his wife, but from a desire to score off the big-wigs who never even knew of his existence. It might be that it was vanity that impelled him, a feeling that his talents had not received the recognition they merited, or just a puckish, impish desire to do mischief. He was a crook. It is true that only two cases of dishonesty had been brought home to him, but if he had been caught twice it might be surmised that he had often been dishonest without being caught. What did Mrs. Trump think of this ? They were so united that she must be aware of it. Did it make her ashamed, for her own uprightness surely none could doubt, or did she

accept it as an inevitable kink in the man she loved? Did she do all she could to prevent it or did she close her eyes to something she could not help ?
How much easier life would be if people were all black or all white and how much simpler it would be to act in regard to them ! Was Trump a good man who loved evil or a bad man who loved good ? And how could such unreconcilable elements exist side by side and in harmony within the same heart ? For one thing was clear, Trump was disturbed by no gnawing of conscience ; he did his mean and despicable work with gusto. He was a traitor who enjoyed his treachery.
Though Ashenden had been studying human nature more or less consciously all his life, it seemed to him that he knew as little about it now in middle age as he had done when he was a child. Of course R. would have said to him: why the devil do you waste your time with such nonsense? The man's a dangerous spy and your business is to lay him by the heels.
That was true enough. Ashenden had decided that it would be useless to attempt to make any arrangement with Trump. Though doubtless he would have no feeling about betraying his employers he could certainly not be trusted. His wife's influence was too strong. Besides, notwithstanding what he had from time to time told Ashenden, he was in his heart convinced that the Central Powers must win the war, and he meant to be on the winning side. Well, then Trump must be laid by the heels, but how he was to effect that Ashenden had no notion. Suddenly he heard a voice.
"There you are. We've been wondering where you had hidden yourself. "
He looked round and saw the Trumps strolling towards him. They were walking hand in hand.
"So this is what has kept you so quiet, " said Trump as his eyes fell on the view. "What a spot !"
Mrs. Trump clasped her hands.
"Ach Gott, wie schön!" she cried. "Wie schön. When I look at that blue lake and those snowy mountains I feel inclined, like Goëthe's *Faust*, to cry to the passing moment : tarry. "
"This is better than being in England with the excursions and alarums of war, isn't it ?" said Trump.
"Much," said Ashenden.
"By the way, did you have any difficulty in getting

out?"
"No, not the smallest."
"I'm told they make rather a nuisance of themselves at the frontier nowadays."
"I came through without the smallest difficulty. I don't fancy they bother much about the English. I thought the examination of passports was quite perfunctory. '
A fleeting glance passed between Trump and his wife. Ashenden wondered what it meant. It would be strange if Trump's thoughts were occupied with the chances of a journey to England at the very moment when he was himself reflecting on its possibility. In a little while Mrs. Trump suggested that they had better be starting back and they wandered together in the shade of trees down the mountain paths.
Ashenden was watchful. He could do nothing ( and his inactivity irked him) but wait with his eyes open to seize the opportunity that might present itself. A couple of days later an incident occurred that made him certain something was in the wind.
In the course of his morning lesson Mrs. Trump remarked :
"My husband has gone to Geneva to-day. He had some business to do there. '
“Oh, " said Ashenden, " will he be gone long?"
"No, only two days.'
It is not everyone who can tell a lie and Ashenden had the feeling, he hardly knew why, that Mrs. Trump was telling one then. Her manner perhaps was not quite as indifferent as you would have expected when she was mentioning a fact that could be of no interest to Ashenden. It flashed across his mind that Trump had been summoned to Berne to see the redoubtable head of the German secret service. When he had the chance he said casually to the waitress :
"A little less work for you to do, fräulein. I hear that Herr Trump has gone to Berne."
"Yes. But he'll be back to-morrow.'
""
That proved nothing, but it was something to go upon. Ashenden knew in Lucerne a Swiss who was willing on emergency to do odd jobs and, looking him up, asked him to take a letter to Berne. It might be possible to pick up Trump and trace his movements. Next day Trump appeared once more with his wife at the dinner-table, but merely nodded to Ashenden and afterwards both went straight upstairs. They looked

troubled. Trump, as a rule so animated, walked with bowed shoulders and looked neither to the right nor to the left. Next morning Ashenden received a reply to his letter : Trump had seen Major von P. It was possible to guess what the Major had said to him. Ashenden well knew how rough he could be : he was a hard man and a brutal, clever and unscrupulous and he was not accustomed to mince his words. They were tired of paying Trump a salary to sit still in Lucerne and do nothing; the time was come for him to go to England. Guess-work? Of course it was guesswork, but in that trade it mostly was : you had to deduce the animal from its jaw-bone. Ashenden knew from Gustav that the Germans wanted to send someone to England.

He drew a long breath ; if Trump went he would have to get busy..

When Mrs. Trump came in to give him his lesson she was dull and listless . She looked tired and her mouth was set obstinately. It occurred to Ashenden that the Trumps had spent most of the night talking. He wished he knew what they had said. Did she urge him to go or did she try to dissuade him? Ashenden watched them again at luncheon. Something was the matter, for they hardly spoke to one another and as a rule they found plenty to talk about. They left the room early, but when Ashenden went out he saw Trump sitting in the hall by himself.
"Hulloa," he cried jovially, but surely the effort was patent, "how are you getting on ? I've been to Geneva. "
"So I heard," said Ashenden.
"Come and have your coffee with me. My poor wife's got a headache. I told her she'd better go and lie down." In his shifty green eyes was an expression that Ashenden could not read. "The fact is , she's rather worried, poor dear ; I'm thinking of going to England. "

Ashenden's heart gave a sudden leap against his ribs, but his face remained impassive :
"Oh, are you going for long? We shall miss you. "
"To tell you the truth, I'm fed up with doing nothing. The war looks as though it were going on for

years and I can't sit here indefinitely. Besides, I can't afford it, I've got to earn my living. I may have a German wife, but I am an Englishman, hang it all, and I want to do my bit. I could never face my friends again if I just stayed here in ease and comfort till the end of the war and never attempted to do a thing to help the country. My wife takes her German point of view and I don't mind telling you that she's a bit upset. You know what women are."
Now Ashenden knew what it was that he saw in Trump's eyes. Fear. It gave him a nasty turn

Trump didn't want to go to England, he wanted to stay safely in Switzerland ; Ashenden knew now what the major had said to him when he went to see him in Berne. He had got to go or lose his salary. What was it that his wife had said when he told her what had happened? He had wanted her to press him to stay, but, it was plain, she hadn't done that ; perhaps he had not dared tell her how frightened he was ; to her he had always been gay, bold, adventurous and devil-maycare; and now, the prisoner of his own lies, he had not found it in him to confess himself the mean and sneaking coward he was.

"Are you going to take your wife with you?" asked Ashenden.
"No, she'll stay here. "
It had been arranged very neatly. Mrs. Trump would receive his letters and forward the information they contained to Berne.
"I've been out of England so long that I don't quite know how to set about getting war-work. What would you do in my place ?".
"I don't know; what sort of work are you thinking of?"
"Well, you know, I imagine I could do the same thing as you did. I wonder if there's anyone in the Censorship Department that you could give me a letter of introduction to. "
It was only by a miracle that Ashenden saved himself from showing by a smothered cry or by a broken gesture how startled he was ; but not by Trump's request, by what had just dawned upon him. What an idiot he had been! He had been disturbed by the thought that he was wasting his time at Lucerne, he was doing nothing, and though in fact, as it turned out,

Trump was going to England it was due to no cleverness of his. He could take to himself no credit for the result. And now he saw that he had been put in Lucerne, told how to describe himself and given the proper information, so that what actually had occurred should occur. It would be a wonderful thing for the German secret service to get an agent into the Censorship Department ; and by a happy accident there was Grantley Trump, the very man for the job, on friendly terms with someone who had worked there. What a bit of luck ! Major von P. was a man of culture and, rubbing his hands, he must surely have murmured : stultum facit fortuna quem bult perdere. It was a trap of that devilish R. and the grim major at Berne had fallen into it. Ashenden had done his work just by sitting still and doing nothing. He almost laughed as he thought what a fool R. had made of him.

"I was on very good terms with the chief of my department, I could give you a note to him if you liked. "

"That would be just the thing."

"But of course I must give the facts. I must say I've met you here and only known you a fortnight."

"Of course. But you'll say what else you can for me, won't you ?"

"Oh, certainly. "

"I don't know yet if I can get a visa. I'm told they're rather fussy. "

"I don't see why. I shall be very sick if they refuse me one when I want to go back."

"I'll go and see how my wife is getting on, " said Trump suddenly, getting up. "When will you let me have that letter?"

"Whenever you like. Are you going at once?"

"As soon as possible. "

Trump left him. Ashenden waited in the hall for a quarter of an hour so that there should appear in him no sign of hurry. Then he went upstairs and prepared various communications. In one he informed R. that Trump was going to England ; in another he made arrangements through Berne that wherever Trump applied for a visa it should be granted to him without question ; and these he despatched forthwith. When he went down to dinner he handed Trump a cordial letter of introduction.

Next day but one Trump left Lucerne.

Ashenden waited. He continued to have his hour's lesson with Mrs. Trump and under her conscientious tuition began now to speak German with ease. They talked of Goethe and Winckelmann, of art and life and travel. Fritzi sat quietly by her chair.
"He misses his master, " she said, pulling his ears. "He only really cares for him, he suffers me only as belonging to him."

After his lesson Ashenden went every morning to Cook's to ask for his letters. It was here that all communications were addressed to him. He could not move till he received instructions, but R. could be trusted not to leave him idle long; and meanwhile there was nothing for him to do but have patience. Presently he received a letter from the consul in Geneva to say that Trump had there applied for his visa and had set out for France. Having read this Ashenden went on for a little stroll by the lake and on his way back happened to see Mrs. Trump coming out of Cook's office. He guessed that she was having her letters addressed there too. He went up to her.
"Have you had news of Herr Trump ?" he asked her.
"No," she said. "I suppose I could hardly expect to yet.
He walked along by her side. She was disappointed, but not yet anxious ; she knew how irregular at that time was the post. But next day during the lesson he could not but see that she was impatient to have done with it. The post was delivered at noon and at five minutes to she looked at her watch and him. Though Ashenden knew very well that no letter would ever come for her he had not the heart to keep her on tenter-hooks.
"Don't you think that's enough for the day? I'm sure you want to go down to Cook's, " he said.
"Thank you . That is very amiable of you. "
When a little later he went there himself he found her standing in the middle of the office. Her face was distraught. She addressed him wildly.
"My husband promised to write from Paris. I am sure there is a letter for me, but these stupid people say there's nothing. They're so careless , it's a scandal."

Ashenden did not know what to say. While the clerk

was looking through the bundle to see if there was anything for him she came up to the desk again.
"When does the next post come in from France ?" she asked.
"Sometimes there are letters about five. "
"I'll come then. "

She turned and walked rapidly away. Fritzi followed her with his tail between his legs. There was no doubt of it, already the fear had seized her that something was wrong. Next morning she looked dreadful ; she could not have closed her eyes all night ; and in the middle of the lesson she started up from her chair.
"You must excuse me, Herr Somerville, I cannot give you a lesson to-day. I am not feeling well. "
Before Ashenden could say anything she had flung nervously from the room, and in the evening he got a note from her to say that she regretted that she must discontinue giving him conversation lessons. She gave no reason. Then Ashenden saw no more of her ; she ceased coming in to meals ; except to go morning and afternoon to Cook's she spent apparently the whole day in her room. Ashenden thought of her sitting there hour after hour with that hideous fear gnawing at her heart. Who could help feeling sorry for her ? The time hung heavy on his hands too. He read a good deal and wrote a little, he hired a canoe and went for long leisurely paddles on the lake ; and at last one morning the clerk at Cook's handed him a letter. It was from R. It had all the appearance of a business communication, but between the lines he read a good deal.
Dear Sir, it began, The goods, with accompanying letter, despatched by you from Lucerne have been duly delivered. We are obliged to you for executing our instructions with such promptness.

It went on in this strain. R. was exultant. Ashenden guessed that Trump had been arrested and by now had paid the penalty of his crime. He shuddered. He remembered a dreadful scene. Dawn. A cold, grey dawn, with a drizzling rain falling. A man, blindfolded, standing against a wall, an officer very pale giving an order, a volley, and then a young soldier, one of the firing-party, turning round and holding on to his gun for support, vomiting. The officer turned paler still, and he, Ashenden, feeling dreadfully faint.

How terrified Trump must have been ! It was awful when the tears ran down their faces. Ashenden shook himself. He went to the ticket-office and obedient to his orders bought himself a ticket for Geneva.
As he was waiting for his change Mrs. Trump came in. He was shocked at the sight of her. She was blowsy and dishevelled and there were heavy rings round her eyes. She was deathly pale. She staggered up to the desk and asked for a letter. The clerk shook his head.
"I'm sorry, madam, there's nothing yet. "
""
"But look, look. Are you sure ? Please look again .'
The misery in her voice was heart- rending. The clerk with a shrug of the shoulders took out the letters from a pigeon-hole and sorted them once more.
"No, there's nothing, madam."
She gave a hoarse cry of despair and her face was distorted with anguish.
"Oh, God, oh, God, " she moaned.
She turned away, the tears streaming from her weary eyes, and for a moment she stood there like a blind man groping and not knowing which way to go.
Then a fearful thing happened. Fritzi , the bull-terrier, sat down on his haunches and threw back his head and gave a long, long melancholy howl. Mrs. Trump looked at him with terror ; her eyes seemed really to start from her head. The doubt, the gnawing doubt that had tortured her during those dreadful days of suspense, was a doubt no longer. She knew.
She staggered blindly into the street.

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# 14. _A Question of Identity_

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*Minute Mysteries*, by Harold Austin Ripley

As Diana Lane was walking down the corridor with her back to Nora, it was impossible for the servant to know Diana was wearing her famous emerald pendant.

> *There is an alchemy of quiet malice by which women can concoct a subtle poison from ordinary trifles*.
>
> Hawthorne.

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